POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND YOUTH-PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS: EXPLORING THE NATURE OF STRENGTHS-BASED PRACTICES WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM PROFESSIONALS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of positive youth development as it incorporates aspects of the strengths perspective. This study focused on youth professionals' understanding of the meaning of youth development, the importance of youth-adult relationships, and the benefits and challenges to successful practices. A qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with 18 youth professionals, including nine social workers, was conducted. The analysis revealed that youth development is applied to work with youth in a variety of settings and the strengths perspective has been applied to the field of social work and youth development. The study identified that the field of social work with youth is moving beyond treatment and prevention toward youth promotion practice as a convergence of a strengths perspective and youth development. Insights from participants and the literature were synthesized to present a conceptualization of youth promotion and its implications for social work.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The image of youth as being problematic has long been dominant in public discourse, professional work, and social science (Checkoway, 1998; Males; 2006; Scales, 2001). Social work has essentially tied its tradition to problems, deficits, and diagnosis rather than strengths and resources. Social work theory and practice have been more interested in troubled children and the services they require, and youth development is emphasized less than treatments and therapeutic interventions compared to other disciplines (Amodeo & Collins, 2007; Morrison, Alcorn, & Nelums, 1997).

Despite the problem-focused tradition, interest in the development and application of the strengths perspective has increased in the past twenty years. There has been increasing attention given to the positive aspects and strengths of children and adolescents in the human development and helping professions (Benson, 1997, 2007; Brown, 2008; Rutter, 1993; Saleebey, 1996, 2005). Further, interests in the strengths perspective, positive psychology, quality of life, psychological wellness, and health promotion have been emphasized in social work and allied fields (Delgado & Zhao, 2008; Maton, Schellenbach, Leadbeater, & Solarz, 2004; Rich, 2003; Snyder & Lopez, 2006). In particular, promoting resilience in youth development has gained prominence as a way to help children and adolescents become competent and responsible adults (Benard, 2004; Lerner, 2004; Sherrod, 2006).

Strengths-based practices are also emphasized in several related areas including youth development, resilience, developmental psychology, health promotion, family support, and community development (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Delgado & Zhao, 2008; Maton et al., 2004; Saleebey, 2005; Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007). Although the specific rationale and

terminology vary, these approaches have common elements that counter traditional deficit-based perspectives.

A youth development framework has been recognized as an important practice for better social work with adolescents. In particular, youth development programs focus on the strengths and potential of youth rather than problems or deficits (Crowe, 2007). Burt, Resnick, and Novick (1998) stress the interconnectedness between strengths, youth development, and competencies. The interconnectedness between these different constructs serves to provide social workers with a foundation from which to examine what role social workers can and should play.

The strengths perspective is applied not only in the social work field, but also in the youth development area (Benard, 1997; Delgado, 2002). Resilience research offers strong support for the possibility of successful application of the strengths perspective to youth development practice (Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Ferber, 2003). In the words of Benard (2004), "the prevention research community is heartened by the accumulating research evidence that resilience and youth development approaches work" (p.2). Resilient children and youth have a set of strengths and competencies that they draw upon.

Recently, there have been efforts to incorporate positive youth development principles into social work practice, such as in child welfare (Melpignano & Collins, 2007), group work (Malekoff, 2004), juvenile justice (Bazemore & Terry, 1997), and therapeutic foster care (Chalmers, 2000). Many youth-serving organizations and child welfare agencies state that they practice strengths-based professional work. However, the field needs more understanding of what strengths-based practice looks like and youth professionals actually do for youth development.

Statement of the Issues

This qualitative study explores the experiences of youth professionals trained in the strengths perspective or positive youth development to better understand how and in what ways they practice strengths-based youth development. The nature of the strengths-based practice in the youth development field and roles of youth professionals will be the focus, rather than program activities or youth problems or issues. Since the strengths perspective is applied in youth development practice and the two perspectives are closely interrelated, youth professionals in the youth development field will be the study participants, and their perspectives and experiences with youth development and youth-professional relationships will be explored.

Youth development can be defined as "the process in which all youths engage over time in order to meet their needs and their competence" (Nixon, 1997, p.571). The term "positive youth development" connotes a focus on supporting or promoting the positive developmental processes that are assumed to advance health and well-being (Benson & Saito, 2001). The idea is that "the best means to prevent problems associated with adolescent behavior and development (e.g., depression, aggression, drug use and abuse, or unsafe sexual behavior) is to promote positive development" (Lerner, Phelps, Alberts, Forman, & Christiansen, 2007, p. 25).

According to Laursen (2003), "At the core of strengths-based practice is the belief that every person has strengths and resources" (p. 12). Positive youth development practices emphasize developing strengths and developmental assets by replacing the deficit view of adolescence (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2006). In the last decade, "the youth development practice had successfully shifted the public dialogue and research base of youth work from one that was deficit oriented to one that articulated the kinds of supports and opportunities young people need to become healthy and functioning adults" (Lewis-Charp, Yu, & Soukamneuth, 2006, p. 21).

This study addresses two key issues related to strengths-based practice in the youth development field: (1) the meaning of positive youth development practices, and (2) the nature of youth-professional relationships within the process of applying the strengths perspective to practice. This section begins with a brief review of social work involvement in youth development in historical perspective. This is followed by the discussion of the strengths-based characteristics of youth development practice and the significance of youth-professional staff relationships as a statement of the problem for this study.

Social Work Involvement in Youth Development Practice

Positive youth development is intentional and educational work with young people with the aim of promoting their positive emotional, mental, physical, spiritual, and intellectual development and strengthening their capacity for productive personal and social relationships (Delgado, 2002; Larson, 2000; Pitman & Zeldin, 1994; Shinn & Yoshikawa, 2008; Young, 1999).

Youth development is not an entirely new idea. The deep traditions of youth development are firmly rooted in the challenges of improving the odds for life success for children at-risk of falling behind their contemporaries. The operational approaches of 20th century youth-serving organizations were reflections of the values of America's industrial society (Lazerson, 1987). It is important to recognize that "a century ago, John Dewey and Jane Addams were talking about the same concepts" (Dryfoos & Barkins, 2006, p.10).

The youth development field is not tied to any specific professional discipline (Morrison et al., 1997). It is found in disciplines such as social work, education, and developmental psychology. Extensive attempts have been made in the practice and theory of youth welfare, community work, and education. Youth development work has deep roots in social group work, recreational studies, and nonformal education (LaBelle, 1981). It does not usually include work

labeled as care, treatment, control, or intervention. In the United States, the youth development work we know today grew out of the settlement house movement, group work model, progressive education, and community-school movement (Lyons, 2000).

In particular, social work has a rich heritage in youth development. Social work was involved in youth developmental work as early as the 1830s, in the process of dealing with the predicament of urban youth crises (Teeter, 1995). Social welfare agencies participated in the child-saving movement and the junior republics movement, along with religious and charitable organizations (Cook, 1996). Youth service agencies were established to deal with youth problems in the 1850s, including the YMCA in 1851, YWCA in 1855, and other religious youth groups later (Erickson, 1998; Galan, 1995).

The settlement house movement began through the establishment of Hull House, with the intention of protecting and promoting the development of children and the well-being of families. Hull House offered practical information, skill development, and opportunities for socialization, as well as problem-focused services. Group work and major models of community work evolved from the settlement house movement (Bruno, 1948). The successful settlements have become large agencies run by professional staff and funded primarily through government grants.

Leisure activities and education for citizenship were also provided as social workers emphasized the values of social participation, the democratic process, learning and growth, and cross-cultural contact (Coyle, 1948; Malekoff, 2001). Increasingly, group services were influenced by the writings of John Dewey, a spokesperson for progressive education. The emphasis was on pursuing new interests and knowledge, as well as learning skills necessary for democratic functioning (Schopher & Galinsky, 1995).

Many public schools have implemented character education programs. According to Rice (1996), “Dewey illuminates the conditions necessary for schools to become more conducive to virtue and good character and – arguably more important – the ways in which all our institutions are responsible for advancing this aim” (p.271). She also stated that “a modern Deweyan would try to encourage activities and social relations that themselves support the development of desired traits of character” (p. 282). The recent youth development trend emphasizes community-based services and after school programs. After school activities provide safe, structured, and enjoyable program opportunities (Kahane, Nagoaka, Brown, & O’Brien, 2001; Shaklee, 2000).

In spite of traditional involvement and contribution of social work and social workers’ professed interest for youth development, they staff relatively few of the neighborhood-based youth services (Delgado, 2000). However, youth service agencies and settlement houses were once extensively staffed with professionally trained social workers. Today, although current social work practice might be dominated by clinical approaches, social workers continue to provide prevention and developmental services for children and youth (Morrison et al., 1997). Problem-prevention, crisis-intervention and treatments are very important. However, investing in children and youth in the early years by engaging them in positive activities is more effective than waiting for their lives to take a bad turn and then providing remedial services.

Strengths-Based Practice in Positive Youth Development Field

The positive youth development practice is explicitly strengths-based in the sense that it is grounded in a philosophy that places value on all youth, and emphasizes their strengths and potential for development and resilience rather than only overcoming their deficits. It is also more holistic in orientation than the risk reduction approach, which basically identifies problems and creates solutions to those problems.

One of the goals of positive youth development is to shift the paradigm for youth services from a programmatic focus on youth problems to a more comprehensive approach that views youth as having assets, resources, and capabilities that deserve full support and development. "Whereas most youth services focused on efforts to fix at-risk and troublesome young people by means of remedial and therapeutic intervention, youth development advocates argued that fixing problems – even if it could be done – was not enough" (Bazemore & Terry, 1977, p. 665). Positive outcomes should be defined and monitored as carefully as negative behaviors (Brown, 2008). Among the critical components of the youth development perspective is the development of youth voice, initiative, and decision-making as key aspects of growth toward maturity (Costello, Toles, Spielberger, & Wynn, 2001).

In order to succeed as adults, youth must acquire adequate attitudes, behaviors, and skills in five areas of competency: (1) health, (2) personal and social skills, (3) knowledge, reasoning, and creativity, (4) vocational skills, and (5) citizenship (Hudson, 1997; Mallon, 1997). Positive youth development provides mechanisms for youths to fulfill their basic needs, including (1) a sense of safety and structure, (2) belonging and membership, (3) self-worth and an ability to contribute, (4) independence and control over one's life, (5) closeness and several good relationships, and (6) competence and mastery (Barton, Watkins, & Jarjoura, 1997; Kirby & Coyle, 1997). Once these needs are fulfilled, youth can more effectively build the competencies necessary to become successful and productive adults.

The benefits of using the positive youth development practice include positive views of young people by adults, increased social capital in communities, improved self-esteem, and the development of skills and competencies (Strobel, Osberg, & McLaughlin, 2006; Yates & Youniss, 1996). If the strengths-based practice of positive youth development is emphasized,

children and youth will produce better outcomes and create more confident relationships in the community. Their strengths and energy will contribute to societal development in a more productive way. As it already happens, the social work profession can extend its service to the youth development field. The youth development field needs professionals who can integrate values, skills, knowledge, and leadership into programs and practices.

Despite these advantages, as mentioned earlier section, since positive youth development principles have been incorporated into social work over the past decade, social workers who practice strengths-based work with troubled children and youth tend to experience more challenges than others. For example, social workers in specific agencies have to learn to walk in two worlds. As Chalmers (2000) notes, staff need to learn "how to see youth as competent and as having potential, while also emphasizing problems enough to address important issues and to keep referral sources assured that they are attending to fixing problems and issues" (p. 27). Agencies providing foster care need to become more deliberate in utilizing the strengths perspective and youth development principles to work with youth in care, if youth are to reap the benefits of youth development efforts (Boldt, Witzel, Russell, & Jones, 2007).

Youth Professionals and Supportive Youth-Professionals Relationship

Youth professionals are essential players in efforts to promote positive youth development. They work in a vast array of youth-serving organizations, welfare agencies, and community settings. In general, they bring passion to their work, as well as a deep commitment to helping young people. They also need to come to the work with "a predictable set of educational experiences, a shared philosophy and language, a common understanding of human development, or a shared sense of youth work history and purpose" (Walker, 2003, p. 373).

It is estimated that at least 300,000 youth workers and staff work in a full- or part-time capacity for over 17,000 youth-serving organizations and agencies in America (Huebner, Walker, & McFarland, 2003). Despite this large number and their vital roles for youth development, little attention has been paid to the experience of adult youth professionals in the youth development field. Research and theory on what youth professionals can do to support positive youth development is limited (Yohalem, 2003).

Positive youth development practice needs to create specific constructive relationships focused on helping youth achieve their developmental potentials. The importance of good relationships with adult professionals is identified by researchers, theorists, and practitioners as critical features of a positive developmental setting for youth. For example, Young (1999) stated that "relationships are the backbone of effective youth work practice" (p. 5) and emphasized relationships that are based on honesty, trust, respect and reciprocity. Benard (1997) and Gaemazy (1993) also stated that a caring and supportive relationship with an adult remains "the most critical variable" for predicting health and resiliency throughout childhood and adolescence.

Yahalem, Pittman, and Wilson-Ahlstrom (2004) identified staff practices and supports to be one of three broad areas that define quality of youth development programs. According to Yohalem (2003), "Operating from a developmental framework, youth professionals plan activities and opportunities in which youth are likely to engage and to experience success, based on realistic expectations of the interests and abilities of young people of different ages" (p. 363). Recently, Dryfoos and Barkins (2006) emphasized that "the need for close and consistent mentoring can change over time, but particularly in the early teen years" (p. 247).

Although it is apparent that professional staff relationships are significant, there is little exploration of how or what makes these relationships significant. Moreover, Roth and Brooks-

Gunn (2003) suggest that the existing support for the positive youth development practice is based more on the "enthusiasm" of those holding to it, than on the research substantiating it (p. 173). In addition, questions remain as to how youth professionals practice the strengths-based approach in the mechanism of youth-professionals relationships, for the development and adjustment of the young participants.

Youth professionals are challenged to succeed in value-based tensions and dilemmas. The ability to interpret the meaning of the concepts and values involved in positive youth development practice is emphasized along with the code of ethics (Young, 1999). Banks (1999) stated that like social work, it has to work within societal ambivalence, "balancing the roles of carer, protecter, advocate and liberator" (p. 3). In particular, scholars of effective youth-adult partnerships have discovered that adult professionals have a delicate balance to strike on a number of issues. According to Walker and Larson (2006), "Practitioners regularly confront complex dilemmas that emerge in their daily work. They face situations where competing objectives, values, and warrants come into conflict" (p. 109).

Purpose of the Study

Therefore it is important to investigate youth professionals' practice of strengths-based youth development. The purpose of this study is to explore the strengths-based practice experiences of youth development professionals who have been trained in the strengths perspective or positive youth development. It sheds light on the meaning of positive youth development combined with the strengths perspective, the nature of the relationship between youth and adult professionals, and the benefits and challenges of strengths-based practices. Several implications for enhancing social work practice with children and youth are discussed.

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the study address gaps in prior research as will be discussed more in the next chapter. They are also influenced by the researcher's personal practice experiences with children and youth in youth-serving organizations for four years, and twelve years' subsequent youth research experiences in a governmental institute for youth development and universities in The Republic of Korea. These questions include the following:

Main research question: How do youth professionals trained in strengths-based practice and who work in youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies practice positive youth development as it relates to a strengths perspective?

Subsidiary research questions:

1. How do these youth professionals describe central guiding principles that direct their practice of positive youth development with the young people?

2. How do these youth professionals understand the nature of their relationships with young participants within the process of positive youth development practices?

3. What do these youth professionals perceive to be the benefits and challenges of their professional practice of strengths-based youth development?

4. What recommendations do these youth professionals offer for better strengths-based practice in positive youth development and social work with children and youth?

Guiding Conceptual Frameworks

The youth development approach does not stand by itself in a vacuum. Contemporary developmental systems theories stress the relative plasticity of human development (Lerner, 2004). Derived from developmental systems theories, a positive youth development perspective regards the plasticity of human development potential for systematic change as a ubiquitous strength of people during their adolescence (Theokas & Lerner, 2006). In particular, recent

development of theoretical paradigms of ecological views, empowerment models, the social goals model, and the strengths perspective in social work also gives ample support to the positive youth development perspective (Batavick, 1997; Lee, 2001; Morrison et al., 1997).

Ecological Perspective

One cannot view youth development outside its contextual environment. Positive youth development aims to create environments in which youth can strengthen their confidence and competencies to meet their needs, and prepare them to live productive lives. It also recognizes the importance of family, friends, neighbors, schools, community groups and other supports as important parts of the process (Checkoway, 1998: Elliott et al., 2007).

By the 1970s, ecological and systems theories provided a conceptual rationale for the development of services addressing children and parents' interaction with one another and with their environment (Germain, 1978; Lightburn & Kemp, 1994). An ecological model is concerned with contexts of problems, which are daily life environments influenced by the variations of personal and situational variables, which afford either risk or opportunity. The ecological models propose an evolutionary, adaptive view of people that sees "the adaptive achievements of individuals as the outcome of interaction between inherited genetic traits and environmental circumstances" (Robbins, Chatterjee, & Canda, 1998, p. 34).

The ecological point of view leads to a philosophical conception of human beings as continually growing, changing and learning (Lee, 2001). In order to fully enhance human functioning, the physical as well as multiple levels and dimensions of the social environment must be assessed concurrently. In the words of Germain (1978), "People and their environments are viewed as interdependent, complementary parts of a whole in which person and environment are constantly changing and shaping the other" (p. 539).

Empowerment Models

The idea of empowerment has also been developed in social work and community work to encourage the self-help of client groups to help them out of a dependency role. It was also applied to the mobilization of community groups and neighborhoods as well as individuals (Wallace, 2001). Empowerment includes participatory behavior, feelings of efficacy and the internal locus of control at the individual level. Empowerment through organizations includes increased decision-making power, opportunities to develop skills, and effective community influence.

Empowerment models basically encourage collective client action (Breton, 1994; Lee, 2001; Wallace, 2001). The concept of empowerment refers to "the process by which individuals and groups gain power, access to resources, and control over their own lives" (Robbins et al., 1998, p. 91). Positive youth development can be achieved via youth empowerment processes (Kim, Crutchfield, William, & Hepler, 1998). Positive youth development has focused on activities that empower youth to build the competencies and skills necessary to become a fully engaged citizen (Villarruel, Perkins, Borden, & Keith, 2003).

The concept of youth empowerment concentrates on the growing opportunities for young people and their achievements in society through access to education, employment and health, as well as to resources, but recognizes that much of the potential of youth is yet to be realized (Helve & Wallace, 2001). According to Lee (2001), "There are three interlocking dimensions of empowerment: (1) the development of a more positive and potent sense of self, (2) the construction of knowledge and capacity for a more critical comprehension of the web of social and political realities of one's environment, and (3) the cultivation of resources and strategies, or more functional competence, for attainment of personal and collective goals" (p.34).

Social Goals Model

Positive youth development reflects the settlement house movement and group work model in the historical perspective of social work. The emphases on human potential and strengths of the individual and their environment in positive youth development are also shared by the social goals model of the group work tradition.

The social goals model has roots in the earliest traditions of professional group work practice, especially in the settlement house tradition and in the social movements of the 1960s. Historically, youth-serving organizations and community centers also relied heavily on this model in developing and promoting group work services (Papell & Rothman, 1966). According to Papell (1997), "The social goals model emerged from our past, from the early group work in settlement, community centers and youth serving organizations, and from our early and foremost writers and thinkers. It spoke to the relations of the individual to society and to the democratic ideology of an informed citizenry for democratic participation" (p. 8).

The social goals model emphasizes social change and the empowerment of oppressed populations as social action group works (Cohen & Mullender, 1999; Cox,1991; Gutierrez & Ortega, 1991; Lee, 1994; Mullender & Ward, 1991). Breton (1994) stated that "oppressed people are not people who are without personal, moral, or spiritual strengths or resources, but rather people whose life chances and choices are significantly curtailed by inequalities in the distribution of social, economic and political power and resources." (p. 24).

The function of social group work is to create a broader base of knowledgeable and skilled citizenry. The social goals model regards the individual as being in need of opportunity and assistance and "every individual is seen as potentially capable of some form of meaningful participation in the main stream of society" (Papell & Rothman, 1966, p. 68). Thus, every group

is also seen as possessing a potential for affecting social change. According to Cohen and Mullender (1999), “The role of social group workers includes facilitating opportunities for the empowerment of group members, assisting group members with the process of determining social action goals and strategies, and challenging internal and external forms of oppression” (p. 16).

Strengths Perspective

The strengths perspective builds interventions on strengths and de-emphasizes pathology (Sullivan, 1992; Rapp, 1998; Saleebey, 1997). The strengths perspective posits that the strengths and resources of people and their environments, rather than their problems and pathologies, should be the central focus of the helping process in social work (Saleebey, 1997).

Youth development emphasized youths’ strengths and ability to contribute regardless of problems or pathologies. Positive youth development also emphasizes the values, strengths and potential of children and youth regardless of their situations, rather than focusing solely on responses to particular risks. The strengths perspective is rooted in the belief that people can continue to grow and change and should have equal access to resources (Chapin, 1995). “Helping people discover and use the resources within and around them – empowerment – is the ultimate goal of the strengths perspective” (Cox, 2001, p. 306).

According to Saleebey (1996), “All must be seen in the light of their capacities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values, and hopes, however dashed and distorted these may have become through circumstance, oppression and trauma” (p. 297). Emphasizing deficits has serious implications and limitations, but focusing on strengths provides considerable advantages (Cowger, 1994). Thus, the strengths perspective can be useful in reformulating the problem-focused, pathology-centered approaches to the development of youth services. Practitioners in

the youth services field can cultivate developmental strengths and assets in young people (Roeser, Iynne, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000)

In summary, this study builds on the support of four theories and perspectives, including the ecological perspective, empowerment model, the social goals model of group work, and the strengths perspective. Although there have been some differences and tensions between these four theories and perspectives, this study tries to take the most relevant insights of the theories and perspectives (Robbins et al., 1998, 2005). Together they provide a conceptual framework that helps us see diverse experiences of human beings from a perspective of strengths-based positive development including the nature of the relationships with children and youth in the process of this exploration. These four guiding conceptual frameworks also provide a body of knowledge that leads to paradigm for inquiry of the study. The ecological perspective and empowerment models give the explicit assumption that strengths-based practice is context-based and process-oriented. The social goals model and the strengths perspective recognize the importance of human potential, strengths, and resources. In particular, the strengths perspective asserts that positive outcomes can be accomplished by tapping into the strengths and ability of the individual and his or her environmental resources.

Significance of the Study

Research Plan

Recent attention on strengths and resiliency of young people has influenced the increasingly strong need for more strengths-focused practice of social work with children and youth (Benard, 2004; Saleebey, 2005). By utilizing a qualitative inquiry, this research examines youth professionals' experiences with positive youth development practice as it relates to the strengths perspective. One way to better understand a practice is to identify the practice

principles, the nature of youth professionals' relationships with young participants, and the benefits and challenges faced within it.

In order to accomplish this objective, this research was conducted by semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews with 18 youth professionals in youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies. Through the data analysis, the meaning of positive youth development and the strengths perspective, the nature of supportive youth/adult relationships, and benefits and challenges of strengths-based practice are explored. This research concludes with the implications for better social work practice with children and youth.

Significance of the Study

Although the social welfare field may be intrigued by principles of positive youth development, the philosophical approach to practice may be hard to implement in social welfare agencies because of the problem-focused tradition in social work. However, social workers' professed interest for positive youth development is necessary to move toward better social work practice involving youth. Watkins and Iverson (1998) stress that as a result of a changing social environment that systematically undervalues youth's assets, social work needs to redouble its efforts to focus on the identification and utilization of youth's strengths.

This study hopes to provide a better understanding of the nature of strengths-based practice in the field of social work with children and youth, and the way that youth professionals and social workers contribute to positive development of young people and supportive youth-adult relationships. Since most previous studies were conducted by disciplines other than social welfare, this study contributes to the reemphasis of a strengths-based approach in social welfare practice for children and youth.

This work also has the potential to both expand our approach to strengths-based youth development issues and enhance the social work profession's contribution to the positive youth development fields. The results of the interviews with 18 youth professionals and other data, including field notes and reflective journals along with transcripts of consultant panel meetings, contribute to a better understanding of (1) youth professionals' roles, (2) their contribution to positive youth development, and (3) the implementation of the successful positive youth development practices.

In addition, this study is significant because it represents experienced professionals' perspectives on youth development practice. Although there are other ways to understand youth development practice, such as through program quality assessment or program effectiveness evaluation, these are mostly done using quantitative methodology based on the responses of young participants, and little information has been gathered from the professionals' perspectives through qualitative methodology.

Although applying positive youth development principles to social work practice can be a necessary and significant experience, this no doubt challenges practitioners to bring the exact form of practice into day-to-day operations. Despite these challenges, if the social work profession wants to have relevant strengths-based youth practices, social work education must put more emphasis on the positive development of youth, and how the strengths perspective and positive youth development can be enhanced through specific strengths-based social work programs with children and youth.

Summary

This research concerns the nature of positive youth development practice as it incorporates aspects of the strengths perspective and its implications for enhancing social work practice with

children and youth. This study focuses on youth professionals' understanding of the meaning of youth development, the importance of the supportive relationship with young people, and the benefits and challenges to successful practices.

This chapter reviewed social work involvement in youth development practice in a historical perspective, followed by the strengths-based characteristics of the positive youth development, roles of youth professionals, and the significance of youth-professional relationships as statement of the problem for the study. The main research question is, "How do professionals in youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies practice positive youth development as it relates to a strengths perspective?" Four theoretical frameworks in social work literature, including ecological perspective, empowerment model, the social goals model, and the strengths perspective are utilized as guiding conceptual frameworks that support the intent of the study. In particular, the strengths perspective has laid a foundation on which positive youth development framework can be resurrected and built.

In the following chapter, a synthesis and analysis of literature related to the study are discussed. The literature review highlights the historical and contemporary contexts of strengths-based youth development practice and the converging characteristics of strengths-based practice. This chapter also describes the significance of the roles of youth professionals and the youth-professional relationships that have helped to inform this study. Chapter 3 presents the qualitative methodology used for this study including the rationale for the research design, methodology for data collection, analysis of the data, and trustworthiness of the study. Chapter 4 provides findings of the study based on the interview data. Youth professionals' understanding of the meaning of positive youth development, their perspectives on the nature of youth-professionals relationships, and their perception of benefits and challenges of implementing

strengths-based practice are analyzed. Chapter 5 presents a new direction of strengths-based youth development practice with a conceptual model. Implications for social work practice, education, policy and research are described as well.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Positive youth development and the strengths perspective have begun to attract greater attention among practitioners, researchers, and policy makers working with children and youth. The position of this study is that positive youth development principles and the strengths perspective are closely interrelated. As discussed in the upcoming sections, the strengths perspective is widely applied in the youth development field, and youth development practice has been applied to the field of social work with children and youth.

In order to better understand the meaning of strengths-based practice with youth, this chapter reviews the historical and contemporary contexts of the problem-focused perspectives on children and adolescents, and then develops a critique with emphasis on a strengths perspective and youth development principles. This chapter also synthesizes insights from the literature in the field of positive youth development, roles of youth professionals in the practice, and the significance of the youth-professional relationships. The benefits and challenges of positive youth development practices are also addressed. This literature review establishes the context for the research questions that guide this study.

Historical Contexts of Problem-focused Perspectives

Problem-focused Perspectives

According to some trends in popular and professional thinking, young people are understood as either problems or victims rather than strengths or resources. Mass media often portray young people as violent, drug addicted, pregnant, drop-outs, or homeless. (Matarese, McGinnis, & Mora, 2005; Nicoles & Goods, 2004). Youth of color, and youth from low-income

backgrounds or residing in urban areas, usually have been viewed more negatively than other youth (Cox & Powers, 1998; Delgado, 2002; Riggins, 1992).

Youth problems and social work. In order to understand negative perspectives toward young people, it is necessary to examine the historical evolution of youth issues, the conceptualization of dominant discourse on adolescents and their relation to intervention by social work professionals as responding to the problems of young people. Although youth issues can be found throughout history, the first time that youth became objects of heightened public concern in the USA can be traced as far back as the 1830s with the development of America's first urban slums (Teeter, 1995). A system of public schools was established in 1842. However, only about half of the city's children attended school and the youth crisis continued over the 19th century with the streets populated by groups of homeless children and adolescents (Nelson, 1996; Teeter, 1995).

Social welfare agencies participated in the child-saving movement, "orphan trains," and the junior republic movement of the 19th century (Cook, 1996). Several youth-serving organizations were created in the 1850s, along with religious and charitable groups, to meet the needs of young working people, including Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) (Erickson, 1998; Galan, 1995; YMCA of the USA, 1984). In 1889, Jane Addams established Hull House, the best-known settlement house, with the intention of protecting and promoting the development of children and well-being of their families (Addams, 1910). In the words of Davis (1972), "from the beginning, it was the plight of the children and the young people that depressed the settlement workers most" (p. xvi).

Youth services agencies and settlement houses utilized group work and emphasized character building (Malekoff, 2001). Many children who from the first came to Hull House were

organized into groups. According to Addams (1910), "the value of these groups consisted almost entirely in arousing a higher imagination and in giving the children the opportunity which they could not have in the crowded schools, for initiative and for independent social relationships" (p.105). Major models of community work evolved from the settlement house. Settlement houses and youth service agencies were once extensively staffed with professionally trained social workers (Morrison et al., 1997).

Negative representation of youth. In the beginning of 20th century, the concept of adolescence as a special time between childhood and adulthood had developed. Finn (2001) argues that adolescence began to be viewed as a separate and strange stage of life as "knowledge from the biological sciences was being appropriated to the social realm" (p.171). In 1904, G. Stanley Hall (1904) introduced the concept of adolescence as a time of "storm and stress" to explain the strange behaviors of youth. He wrote that "development is less gradual and more salutatory, suggestive of some ancient period of storm and stress" (p. xiii). Hall's "storm and stress" description of adolescence influenced adults' perception of adolescence as a stormy period of life and it was internalized by society as a way to describe the typical teenager (Nicoles & Good, 2004).

Problem-focused perspectives in social work. With the dominant view of adolescence as a stage of turmoil, youth have been viewed by social workers as problems to be solved or victims to be saved (Finn & Checkoway, 1998). Weick, Rapp, Sullivan, and Kisthardt (1989) state that "the existence of problem provides the raison d'etre for the existence of professional helpers" (p.351). Social workers began to call for a more professional approach, and more attention was paid to the individual and defining the problems in people's lives, thus interest in community

work was decreased (Day, 2000). Studies of pathology and individual differences were incorporated into the casework approach to social work practice (Richmond, 1922).

By the late 1930s, interest in the psychoanalytic approach was increased as the theoretical structure for defining individuals' problems (Weick et al., 1989). Psychoanalytic theorists posited a different recapitulation theory. For example, Freud (1946) argued that youth were inevitably fraught with parent-child conflict. According to De Anda (1995), psychoanalytic theorists see "the developmental processes of adolescence as a recapitulation of earlier infantile stages of development through the reexperiencing of either oedipal or pre-oedipal conflicts" (p.18). The psychoanalytic theory and its derivatives further facilitated pathology theories in their practice with youth (Day, 2000).

By the 1950s, the psychiatric approach and psychosocial approach seemed to exist together. Although psychosocial theories of adolescents emphasized the impact of the sociocultural context on individual development, the two approaches still focused on problems. A problem-solving framework for social casework was also introduced and prevailed as one of social work's durable practice models (McMillen, Morris, & Sherraden, 2004). Moreover, the negative conceptualization of adolescence was further introduced during the periods. For example, Erikson (1963) also viewed adolescence as a time of turmoil and stress characterized by an "identity crisis." For Erikson, although this "identity crisis" leads to clarified sense of identity as part of a positive development process, adolescence came to signify both key physiological changes and the development of a separate independent adult identity. According to Griffin (1993), the process of identity formation and the nature of normal adult behavior were defined as having their natural origins in hormonal and other changes at puberty.

As the mental health field began to emerge in the profession, problem-focused and deficit-based perspective and practices become more dominant among social workers (Finn, 2001). In the early 1980s, troubled youth were increasingly pushed into residential hospitals for treatment. Males (1996) asserts that the commitment of adolescents to psychiatric treatment was not increased by a rise in mental health problems of young people, but promoted more by hospital profiteering. He argues that "a large majority of youths in psychiatric treatment were impounded under an exploding proliferation of new and vague diagnoses" (p. 31). Finn (2001) discusses the ways in which particular images of pathology are appropriated and deployed in the constructions of troubled youth. She contends that "young people are assessed and diagnosed in an ever-expanding taxonomy of risk, danger, and pathology" (p. 184).

Critique of the Problem-focused Perspective

Challenges to negative views of youth. Although social work played an important role in dealing with the problems of young people, the problem-focused understanding of children and adolescents has been too dominant. The neglect of youth's "social agency" has been one of the consequences (Mayall, 2002), and society may miss important opportunities to keep young people on a positive trajectory. Problem-focused perspectives are criticized as promoting a construction of adolescence itself as pathology (Delgado, 2000). Damon (1997) asserts that problem youth tradition has been influential in the portrayal of young people in the mass culture and as a consequence in the mind. Valencia (1997) identifies the racial and class biases at the core of the evolution and application of the deficit approach in education.

A challenge to biological determinism has been posed along with the conceptualization of adolescence. Many studies of youth culture, within political and historical contexts, have contradicted the understanding of adolescence as a universal life stage of "storm and stress." For

instance, many studies identified the fact that the average citizen does not hold a "storm and stress" view of youth. In the 1960s, Bandura (1964) reported that published research data showed that the view of "storm and stress" was unwarranted and rather argued that the mass media sensationalizes adolescent behavior. Scales (2001) also pointed out that most negative views of youth are based on limited first-hand knowledge and the negative media coverage. Astroth (1999) states that the portrayal of troubled youth is solely a product of "ephebiphobia- a fear and loathing of adolescence" (p. 25).

Criticism in social work literature. Problem-focused views and practices also have been criticized in social work literature. Goldstein (1990) points out that a pathology approach tends to reduce the complexities of the human state to narrow compartments of diagnostic schemes. Weick et al. (1989) summarized the problem with problem-focused practice into three points: "(1) the problem invariably is seen as a lack or inability in the person affected; (2) the nature of the problem is defined by the professional; and (3) treatment is directed toward overcoming the deficiency at the heart of the problem" (p.352). In fact, the prevailing negative perspective was continuously challenged with the new perspectives or models of practice. Attention to capacity-building has been found in the writings of the settlement house workers (Addams, 1910, 1972; McMillen et al., 2004), and motivation and opportunities have been mentioned in social casework (Richmond, 1922; Ripple & Alexander, 1956). The interactional approach (Schwartz, 1971), life model (Germain & Gitterman, 1980), and competence framework (Maluccio, 1981) have been proposed. Issues in overturning a medical model of social work practice have been raised (Weick, 1983), along with a health model (Weick, 1986), and a focus on the uniqueness of the individual (Pray, 1991). In particular, the ecological models and empowerment models have been presented as a challenge to a deficit orientation (Lee, 2001).

Although social work has taken pride in being a problem-solving profession, problem-focused treatment practice was further criticized and prevention approaches began to be emphasized. According to Goleman (1995), crisis interventions "come too late, after the targeted problem has reached epidemic proportions and taken firm root in the lives of the young" (p. 256). Recently, Finn (2001) argued that many problem-focused treatment programs are not preparing young people in productive ways. Rather, she asserts that "many young people are being prepared for their place in a continuum of care, control or containment" (p.168). The prevention approach grew out of the realization that it can be more cost-effective and efficient to prevent problems from occurring initially than to treat them after they are established (Small & Memmo, 2004).

However, it is also important to emphasize that problems cannot be ignored "because they serve as constraints to building capacity, or because consumers are in crisis, and solving their problems (such as meeting basic needs for food, shelter, and safety) must come first in the interest of their well-being" (McMillen et al., 2004, p. 324). It is also true that consumers do not seek social work services when their lives are problem-free. Social workers need to help clients with the problems they confront.

Evolution of Strengths-based Youth Practices

Emergence of a Strengths Perspective and Youth Development

Positive views on adolescents. Along with the criticism on problem-focused perspective, positive views on adolescents have increased over the last 20 years. The adequacy of the problem-focused perspective for addressing young people's development has begun to be questioned. Some people who work with children and youth recognize the power of an alternative approach, one which focuses on the strengths and positive aspects of the youth. This

approach views young people as having strengths, assets, potential, or resources, in contrast to the views of youth as problems and victims (Barton et al., 1997; Checkoway, Allison, & Montoya, 2005; Kurth-Schai, 1988). In fact, young people need this perspective in order to transition successfully into adulthood and to enhance the quality of services they receive. (Collins, 2001; Matarese et al., 2005). Proponents of this approach have recognized that the solutions to many problems that children and adolescents face can be found in the strengths of individuals themselves, their families, and their communities (Maton et al., 2004).

The strengths perspective. It was in these conditions that the strengths perspective and youth development principles began to attract greater attention among practitioners, researchers, and policy makers working with children and youth. As mentioned earlier, the positive aspects or strengths have been addressed through social work history, however, the words "strengths perspective" began to appear in the social work profession in 1989 (De Jong & Miller, 1995; Rapp, 1998; Saleebey, 1996, 2004; Weick et al.,1989).

The strengths perspective has emerged based on the recognition that focusing on the problem does not solve the problem. It was based on the assumption that, despite their adversities such as mental illness, individuals could build a life beyond the problems. It is rooted in the belief that "people can continue to grow and change and should have equal access to resources" (Chapin, 1995, p. 507). According to Carver and Scheier (2003), the concept "human strength" is taken by most people as referring to "ways in which humans overcome daunting obstacles, triumph over adversity, and emerge successfully from transactions that have pressed them to their limits" (p. 87). Although the concept of strengths is represented in a variety of forms (Snyder & Lopez, 2006), Saleebey (2005) suggests a simple device for framing and

remembering the essence of the strengths perspective as “3P” (promise, possibility, positive expectations), “3C” (competence, capacities, courage), and “3R” (resilience, reserve, resources).

Tapping these strengths serves to maximize the potential of individuals and communities. The strengths perspective draws attention to human meaning, agency, and capacity (Finn & Jacobson, 2003). Petr (2004) states that “the strengths perspective is integral to combating adultcentrism, engaging in family-centered practice, and respecting diversity and difference” (p. 155). When viewed from a strengths perspective, the environment serves as a source of opportunities for individuals and increases the number of helping resources (Sullivan, 1992). In addition, a strengths perspective serves to identify, mobilize, reinforce, and enhance existing resources in the development of community solutions to community concerns.

Youth development. The youth development perspective sees “youth as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be managed” (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, p.3). This perspective assumes that all youth possess individual and ecological assets that have the potential to be marshaled in the service of enhancing their healthy life chances. In contrast to prevention approaches, it moves beyond the eradication of risk and deliberately argues for the positive development and the conditions that contribute to youth health and well-being. Youth development advocates assert that simply preventing problems is not enough to prepare youth for adulthood (Benson, 1997; Delgado, 2002; Gillham, Shatte, & Freres, 2000; Silbereisen & Lerner, 2007; Small & Memmo, 2004).

Youth development places particular emphasis on the existence of healthy conditions, and expands the concepts of health to include the skills, pro-social behaviors, and competencies needed to succeed in employment, education, and civic life (Bazemore & Terry, 1997; Pittman et al., 2003). Youth development recognizes the importance of family, friends, neighbors, schools,

community groups and other support as important parts of the process (Shinn & Yoshikawa, 2008; Villarruel et al., 2003; YMCA of the USA, 2004). Research at the Search Institute over the last decade has shown that the more "developmental assets" young people experience, the less high-risk behavior they engage in, and the more they behave in positive ways (Benson, 2007; Scales & Leffert, 1999). In a study that examined twenty-five youth development programs, Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak and Hawkins (2002) concluded that a wide range of positive youth development approaches can result in positive outcomes and the prevention of problem behaviors.

Development and Application of Strengths-based Practices with Youth

There is a need for more strengths-focused practice of social work with children and adolescents. Seita (2000) called for a shift in child welfare practice toward more positive approaches, including incorporating elements of connectedness, continuity, dignity, and opportunity in working with youth. Benard (2004) acknowledges that "the most effective, efficient, and even rewarding and joyful approach to problem prevention is through supporting healthy youth development" (p. 2). "There is nothing particularly new about interventions based on positive youth development" (Amodeo & Collins, 2007, p. 75).

Youth development also reflects the settlement house and group work model. Although current group work practices are often transformed into the antithesis of the strengths perspective, the early traditions of group work were laden with a strengths perspective (Malekoff, 2001; Petr, 2004), Recently, from a social work perspective, Delgado (2000; 2002) utilizes a youth development paradigm and applies it to urban youth and raises points of consideration when youth development principles conflict with cultural values. Saleebey (2005) also mentioned

developmental resilience, health and wellness, and solution-focused approaches as areas of the important "converging lines of research and practice" that support the strengths perspective.

*The strengths perspective in social work with children and youth***.** This understanding is supported with the recent growing interest in the development and application of the strengths perspective and youth development to social work practices with children and adolescents. Needless to say, the strengths perspective is implemented throughout social work practice with children and youth. This includes children's mental health (Harniss & Epstein, 2005), substance abuse prevention (Delgado, 1997), child welfare (Collins, 2001), and juvenile justice (Bazemore & Terry, 1997; Clark, 1996), to name but a few. In particular, Rapp (1998; 2002) has developed a strengths-based case management model. Poertner and Ronnau (1992) have used a strengths perspective with children with emotional disabilities. Laursen (2000) outlines the strengths based practices that have been found to be effective with challenging children.

The strengths perspective in youth development. A strengths perspective is not limited to social work. It is widely applied in the youth development field. Resilience research offers strong support for the possibility of successful application of strengths perspective to youth development practice (Pittman et al., 2003). In the words of Benard (2004), "the prevention research community is heartened by the accumulating research evidence that resilience and youth development approaches work" (p.2). It challenges the youth development fields to move beyond a fixation with content to a focus on context (Benard, 1997). Resilient children and youth have a set of strengths and competencies that they draw upon. In addition, Frey (1999) acknowledges service learning as a strengths-based intervention that builds on the inherent strengths of students with emotional and behavioral challenges.

*Youth development in social welfare***.** Recently, youth development practice has been applied to the field of social work with children and adolescents. According to Melpignano and Collins (2003), "a development relevant to addressing adolescent youth in the child welfare system has been increased to principles of positive youth development to help all youth to achieve successful life outcome" (p.160). R.G. Schwartz (2003) pointed out that "the tenets of positive youth development are more applicable in work with children who are at risk for entering the juvenile justice system than with those who are inside the formal system" (p. 421). Youth involvement in system of care communities is ever-evolving (Matarese et al., 2005). The deficit-based model of mental illness is moving toward strengths-based models of youth development (Chalmers, 2000).

The Converging Characteristics of Strengths-based Practices

Commonalities between the strengths perspective and positive youth development. In addition to these developments, several commonalities and differences between these two perspectives emphasize the necessity and importance of a convergence of the two approaches. The common element of the strengths perspective and positive youth development is that they both grew from discontent with the problem-focused perspectives, and both transform deficit-based approaches into strengths-based approaches. As already discussed, the strengths perspective builds interventions on strengths and de-emphasizes pathology. Positive youth development stresses the values, strengths and potential of children and youth regardless of their situations rather than focusing solely on responses to particular risks. Also, both perspectives are moving in the same direction to promote young people's development, quality of life, health and psychological wellness, and advocacy (Mason, 2003).

The strengths perspective and youth development begin with a focus on the positive potential of individuals, families, and communities. For the strengths perspective, "almost anything, given circumstances and context can be a strength or asset" (Saleebey, 2005, p. 301). Youth development also values internal and external assets, support and opportunities which denote an ecological perspective. In particular, both perspectives lay stress on the role of helping people and using environmental resources. The strengths practice often involves helping people put together their personal assets and their environmental resources toward the building of a better life. In addition to the importance of a caring adult, relationships in which youth and adults are partners are considered to be the core of youth development.

Differences between the strengths perspective and youth development. Despite these common elements, the strengths perspective and youth development principles seem to contrast in a number of ways based on their portrayal in the literature. For example, the strengths perspective stresses "the process of finding solutions" (Weick, Kreider & Chamberlain, 2005, p. 117), while the youth development approach focuses on personal development or social contribution rather than personal problem solving (Pittman & Zeldin, 1994). The strengths perspective also capitalizes on existing strengths, resources, assets, and abilities both within an individual and around family and community (Saleebey, 1997). Although new strengths are considered in the strengths perspective, youth development also places emphasis on building new strengths or assets (Benson, 2003, 2007). From the strengths perspective, strengths that are discovered may be in existence but not recognized, or may be new strengths. In addition, the strengths perspective targets strengths as central to the process of intervention by engaging the strengths of practitioners or staff in designing, implementing, and evaluating interventions (Harness & Epstein, 2005). The youth development approach targets strengths as the content

focus of the intervention by building strengths among youth who receive interventions rather than by engaging the strengths of staff (Maton et al., 2004).

Principles of strengths-based practices. Principles lead directly to the choice to implement specific practices. According to Pittman and Zeldin (1995) principles are "statements that put forth the guidelines about the implementation of practice, and how practice ought to be made available to participants" (p. 6). Principles provide practitioners with important direction and guidelines for conducting practice (Adams, 2000). In addition, principles act as a natural bridge between abstract theoretical concepts and real issues in the field. According to Delgado (2002), "Principles integrate knowledge (experiential and theoretical), values, and assumptions. They can play an instrumental role in shaping practice across different geographical, organizational settings, and population groups" (p. 79).

As discussed earlier, convergence of a strengths perspective and positive youth development principles presents the characteristics of strengths-based practices in the field of youth development and social work with adolescents. The strengths perspective and youth development approaches have commonalities and differences, and each approach has strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, by applying the two perspectives into strengths-based practice, better professional service, support, and opportunities can be provided to children and adolescents in need and all young people in the end. It is expected that adolescents will produce better outcomes and create more confident relationships in the community. Their energy and strengths will contribute to the societal development in a more productive way. The strengths perspective and youth development approaches clearly focus on human capacity, assets, and aspirations rather than on deficits and failure.

Service to targeted youth can be enhanced from the strengths perspective and expanded to the provision of support and opportunities advocated by the youth development practice. The strengths perspective offers a way for social workers to move beyond the role of therapy to connect more deeply with the broad roles and goals of the social work profession. As a productive developmental process of growth, youth development can contribute to healthy, satisfying, and productive lives for adolescents by promoting their well-being.

It is not possible to practice strengths-based practice or positive youth development without a set of principles. When youth professionals practice, they often work from a set of guiding practice principles (Schatz & Flagler, 2004). Practice principles should play an influential role in carrying forth the paradigm into the field In the words of Pittman and Zeldin (1995), "Defining practice principles is integral to the effectiveness of any organization but critical to effectiveness of those organizations approaching work with youth and families from a development rather than a problem perspective; and, linking principles to practice within an organization or to standards of practice across organizations is a challenging and sometimes controversial task" (p. 2).

The principles of the strengths-based practices as a combining characteristic of the strengths perspective and youth development, can be inferred from the existing principles of strengths perspective and other efforts of infusing youth development principles into social work field. For example, Saleebey (1997) identifies five principles of strengths perspectives. "(1) every individual, family and community has strengths, (2) trauma, abuse, and struggle may be sources of challenge and opportunity, (3) take individual, group, and community aspirations seriously, (4) collaborating with clients, and (5) every environment is full of resources" (pp.12-15). Each of these principles serves to guide and direct each element of the strengths approach.

Malekoff's (2004) seven-principle framework for "strengths-based group work with children and adolescents" also needs to be stressed, since "group work was the bedrock of early youth development" (p.246). The seven principles include (1) from groups based on members' felt needs and wants, not diagnoses, (2) structure groups to welcome the whole person, not just the troubled parts, (3) integrate verbal and nonverbal activities, (4) decentralize authority and turn control over to group members, (5) develop alliances with relevant other people in group members' lives, (6) maintain a dual focus on individual change and social reform, and (7) understand and respect group development as a key to promoting change.

Delgado's (2000) fourteen strengths principles for effective youth programming in youth development can be applicable to the youth promotion principles. As one of the principles, he recognizes activities for youth to participate in and opportunities for youth to increase their self-esteem. He also suggests a principle of effective youth programs to be built upon what youths value and their assets. According to his principles, programs must (1) emphasize innovative, dynamic, and comprehensive approaches to serving youth, (2) provide youths with opportunities to succeed and contribute to their community, (3) have multiple clear, high, and realistic expectations for participants, (4) be voluntary and provide youth with decision-making powers in shaping programming, (5) be built on quality staff and programming and a willingness to invest resources in support of staff, and (6) emphasize positive intergenerational mentoring relationships.

Strengths-based Practice in Positive Youth Development

Previous sections reviewed historical and contemporary contexts of a problem-focused perspective and the emergence of the strengths perspective and positive youth development. A critique on the problem-focused perspective has developed with emphasis on the evolution of

strengths-focused practices. The converging characteristics of the strengths perspective and positive youth development are addressed with the recent growing interest in the application of the two perspectives in the social work and youth development fields.

Since this study focuses on youth-serving professionals' practice experiences with positive youth development, two essential concepts of positive youth development practice and youth-professional relationships are reviewed in this section. This section begins by describing key features of youth development programs and the roles of youth-serving organizations, followed by discussion of the roles of youth professionals in positive development practices.

The Youth Development Field and Youth-Serving Organizations

The field of youth development. Throughout the literature of the youth development field, positive youth development is explained in four ways: a natural developmental process (Larson, 2000; Pittman & Zeldin, 1994), a philosophical framework (Bazemore & Terry, 1997), a programmatic (organizational) approach (Delgado, 2002; Nixon, 1997), and partnerships for the community (Checkoway, 1998).

First, positive youth development describes something young people do – the natural process of learning, growing, and changing. According to this view, youth development is the result of the accumulation of the everyday people, places and possibilities that youth experience (Benson, 2003; Larson, 2000; Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2002; Pittman & Zeldin, 1994). Positive youth development enables individuals to lead a healthy, satisfying, and productive life.

Second, positive youth development describes the philosophy of understanding young people characterized by a strength-based approach to the experience of childhood and adolescence. This philosophical approach appears to rest on the twin assumptions that "problem-

free is not fully prepared" and "fully prepared is not fully engaged."(Pearl, Grant, & Wenk, 1978; Bazemore & Terry, 1997; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001).

Third, positive youth development describes a way of working with young people, one that values their participation, contribution, and unique personal characteristics. According to this view, youth development is achieved through efforts to create activities and settings that provide a context that promotes a young person's development (Finn & Checkoway, 1998; Wheeler, 2000; Delgado, 2002). Program participation is not limited to those identified as at risk or in need (Nixon, 1997). Positive youth development is done with and by youth.

Fourth, positive youth development describes the relationships between youth and adults on behalf of their communities. According to this view, youth development means providing youth with the necessary opportunities for them to demonstrate a full complement of positive connections to self, others, and the larger community (Checkoway, 1998; Pittman & Zeldin, 1994; Perkins, Borden, & Villarruel, 2001). Youth are fully invested in their community and are empowered as full partners to provide direction, insight, energy, and efforts around problem-solving for the community.

Positive youth development practices, with their emphasis on developing strengths and assets, are a response to the more prominent deficit model that targets the prevention and reduction of problems. According to Dryfoos and Brakin (2006), "It is not enough to define youth outcomes as the absence of problems; one must also consider the presence of assets vocational readiness, social and emotional health, physical health, civic engagement, and educational attainment" (p. 12). As social and economic pressures on traditional institutions such as extended family and cohesive neighborhoods increase, a variety of formal and informal youth

development programs are assuming an increasingly critical role in the healthy development of today's youth (Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund, 1996; Yohalem, 2003).

Positive youth development emphasizes the optimal growth process and has not been mainly designed for troubled youth. Delgado (2002) provides seven overarching themes of youth development: (1) an inherent belief in the worth of youth, (2) the importance of cultural heritage, (3) the importance of young people exercising control over their lives, (4) a holistic perspective of assets and needs, (5) a belief that young people have innate capacities, (6) community responsibility for youth development, and (7) a long-range commitment to youth.

The field of youth development focuses on distinguishing the boundaries of youth development programming from myriad other programs targeted toward young people. According to Roth, Brooks-Gunn, Murray and Foster (1998), "Youth development programs are developmentally appropriate programs designed to prepare adolescents for productive adulthood by providing opportunities and supports to help them gain competencies and knowledge needed to meet the increasing challenges they will face as they mature" (p. 427).

Youth development programs typically take place in the nonschool hours, and are situated in after-school and community-based contexts such as community centers, faith-based youth groups, extracurricular clubs and activities, art organizations, and service and leadership groups. In particular "in terms of the amount of time spent by youths in an organized setting, youth-development organizations are second only to schools" (Delgado, 2002, p. 136).

Roles of youth-serving organizations. An important feature of youth development settings is that they provide youth with a sense of belonging and being valued, of perceiving caring and connectedness, and opportunities for meaningful engagement (Connell, Gambone, & Smith, 2000; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Youth development programs should provide "safety,

supportive relationships, appropriate structure, opportunities for belonging and skill building, positive social norms, and support for efficacy and mattering" (Shinn & Yoshikawa, 2008, p. 3).

Youth development programs have been associated primarily with youth-serving organizations rather than the child welfare agencies. Youth-serving organizations like the YMCA/YWCA, Boys & Girls Clubs of America (BGGA), and the Boy Scouts have provided support to young people for several generations (Erickson, 1998; Costello et al., 2001). These youth organizations provide safe, comfortable environments for young people. Youth feel protected from their environments and supported by program staff. Youth organizations also offer opportunities for young people to use their time constructively and to serve and contribute to the community. They give youth "a chance to hear consistent messages about expected values and behavior, and help youth feel that people care about them and support them" (Nelson, 1998, p. 8).

Kaltreider and St. Pierre (1995) identified five other key features common to youth-serving organizations. First, many youth organizations provide a relaxed, informal atmosphere. Children and youth can feel accepted in non-stressful situations. Second, organizations promote the development of interpersonal relationships. Staff act as positive role models for many youth who may not have exemplary individuals at home to imitate. Bonding among youth participants also promotes relationships. Third, organizations offer meaningful opportunities for young participants. Recreational, social, and leadership activities are attractive to youth and serve as an "alternative" program for generic school-based prevention programs. Fourth, professional staff in organizations provide individual attention to youth and their surrounding circumstances. Programs can be tailored to meet specific needs, cultural backgrounds, and varying life circumstances. Fifth, most organizations attain extensive histories and positive reputations within

the communities they serve. Activities are supported by businesses, city organizations, and schools.

Roles of youth professionals in positive youth development. A characteristic of youth organizations is their employment of professional staff. Youth development professionals are working in a vast array of agencies, organizations and community settings as essential players in community efforts to promote positive youth development (Walker, 2003). Youth professionals are the front line of the programs, organizations, and systems that touch young people in the nonschool hours. They work at the intersection where the young person meets the system, and they define in large part the everyday experience a young person has with a program.

As positive youth development practice emerges as a field, the need for highly qualified youth development professionals becomes increasingly clear. In addition, the issue of staffing requires attention not only in the area of professional training, but also in terms of recruitment, compensation, and turnover (Hahn & Raley, 1998).

Maier (1991) discussed the importance of teaching youth life skills, while Garfat (1991) reported that youth workers create healthier self-control in youth and provide for their social and emotional growth. Hills (1989) discussed four abilities necessary for effective youth workers: (1) contextual awareness, (2) discretionary decision-making, (3) performance, and (4) confidence. Fewster (1999) discussed personal growth and self-awareness as necessary attributes for youth professionals in order to develop new skills and techniques.

Recently, Yohalem (2003) described the three skill areas and three characteristics of successful youth development professionals. First, successful youth development professionals possess the following knowledge and skills: (1) The ability to build and sustain meaningful relationships with and on behalf of youth and families; (2) an understanding of relevant theory

(i.e., educational, ecological, social) and current cultural trends affecting youth; and (3) the ability to create and maintain positive, safe learning experiences and environments in which youth have meaningful roles and responsibilities. Second, successful youth development professionals are: (1) optimistic, seeing youth as positive, productive contributors (or potential ones) rather than problems or liabilities; (2) consistent, yet flexible; and (3) passionate about their work and committed to young people.

At a more general level, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) developed a model of skill acquisition that provides a framework for mapping changes in thinking as professionals learn how to act in unstructured situations. Dreyfus and Dreyfus identified five stages – novice, beginner, competent, proficient, expert – through which the learner advances. Throughout these five stages, the learner progresses from detached, abstract, and consciously analytic behavior in a situation to involved, skilled behavior that is based on unconscious and intuitive recognition of similarities with past experience. Fook, Ryan, and Hawkins (2000) develop their theory of professional expertise by expanding the five-stage model by adding two further stages to the model: pre-student and experienced.

Despite the important roles of youth professionals, in many places the preparation of youth development professionals has been relatively haphazard. Also, youth professional staff tend to resign, hoping to find better opportunities in other areas (Ryan, Merighi, & Healy, & Renouf, 2004). Although professionals in social work and education participate in a formal, systematic certification process, there is neither a structured process nor a clearly defined disciplinary framework when it comes to training people for careers in the youth development field. In the words of Yohalem (2003), “Individuals who play a critical role in nurturing the healthy development of young people often find themselves lacking the necessary knowledge, support,

and resources to meet the staggering needs they face daily" (p. 359). If youth professionals do not recognize who they are and what needs and expectations are being met by working with youth, they will not be in a position to help youth learn about themselves and change and grow.

Youth-Professional Relationships in Positive Youth Development Practices

Relationships are at the heart of youth work. Throughout the development of both strengths perspective and youth development work, the importance of the interpersonal relationship in the helping effort has been a constant theme. No matter what strategies may support the helping process, the nature of the relationship has long been recognized as the medium through which change occurs (Petr, 1988; Seligson & Stahl, 2003). The limited literature that does exist on youth professionals supports the notion that the relationships that youth workers cultivate with the youth they serve are instrumental in influencing youth.

In the field of youth development, the relationships between young participants and adult youth workers have been shown to be an important protective factor for positive youth development. Pittman and Zeldin (1994) stressed that the process of positive youth development requires engagement fostered by relationships and participation. Young (1999) emphasizes that "the relationship between the youth worker and young person is like the foundation of a house. If it's not firmly established then the walls and ceiling will collapse. There is responsibility on the youth worker to demonstrate to young people that positive relationships with adults are possible" (p. 63).

Significance of youth-professional relationships. It is argued that these relationships provide young people with sense of safety and security, access to resources, and models for future possibilities. In particular, supportive relationship with caring adults is consistently identified as a key feature of youth development settings (Connell et al., 2000; Eccles &

Gootman, 2002; Merry, 2000). Research demonstrates the importance of positive youth-professional relationships for demonstrating youth outcomes (Rosenthal & Vandell, 1996; McLaughlin, 2000). Through interaction with supportive adults, youth acquire the skills necessary for successfully negotiating the world at large.

For example, the very foundation of mentoring youth program is the idea that if caring, concerned adults are available to young people, youth will be more likely to become successful adults themselves (Davidson & Redner, 1998; Dondero, 1997; DuBois & Karcher, 2005; Rhodes & Roffman, 2003). Dryfoos and Barkins (2006) noted that "every child must be attached to a responsible adult – if not a parent, then someone else" and "such a someone else can be a teacher, relative, friend, friend's parent, volunteer mentor, or youth worker, preferably with some knowledge of youth development" (p. 247). Although mentoring programs usually differ in length, type, and quality, there is general agreement that mentoring is meant to be a helping relationship (Jackson, 2002). Through shared activities, guidance, information, and encouragement, the individual gains in character and competence and begins setting positive life goals (Barron-McKeagney, Woody, & D'Souza, 2001).

The nature of youth-professional relationships. While research emphasizes a supportive youth-professional relationship, studies on the nature of the youth professional's role in the relationship with young people, or how youth professionals enact their day-to-day practice, have been very limited. According to Thompson (1999), "The establishment of a relationship between the worker and the youth can be considered as a social process or a series of interconnected steps" (p. 20). In the field of detached youth work, Bernstein (1964) described the stages of establishing relationships as recognition, contact, association, influence, and help with specific problems. Garfat (1991) developed a phase theory which addressed the nature of interactions

with youth rather than the characteristics of workers. He explained that workers progress through "Doing For," "Doing To," "Doing With," and "Doing Together" as they spend more time in the field and encounter more and varied experiences with youth. Weisman (1999) discussed what workers can do to break down the youths' barriers to relationships. Professional training is valuable, but more importantly, particular intangible characteristics were noted. Genuineness, strength of character, positive attitude, honesty and dependability were also considered necessary.

Krueger (1991) identified nine themes that provide a foundation for relationship formation: (1) coming from a youth center, (2) being there, (3) teaming up, (4) meeting them where they are, (5) interacting, (6) counseling on the go, (7) creating circles of care, (8) discovering and using self, and (9) caring for one another. Also, Krueger (1998) has represented youth work practice as an interactive "dance," between youth and a professional worker, containing rich elements of "presence," "meaning," "rhythm," and "atmosphere." Similarly Fewster (1982, 1999) discussed characteristics of relationships that are necessary for youth professionals to learn and grow: (1) being present, (2) recognizing that opinions and judgments belong to the people giving them, (3) role-taking, (4) keeping things clear, (5) establishing boundaries, and (6) maintaining a personalized workplace.

To summarize, children and youth need positive relationships in their lives to help them face the everyday challenges that are encountered. Those youth who come from unstable or troubled backgrounds are the most vulnerable to negative attitudes and behaviors, and the most likely to come in contact with youth professionals. Their job is to form healthy, positive relationships with the youth in which they feel safe, secure, and supported in their growth and development. Thus the relationships between youth and youth professionals need to be

professional, ethical, and developed with boundaries to ensure that the youth are protected from harm.

Challenges to supportive relationships: Ethics, boundaries, and adultism. Relationships between youth and youth professionals, however, may not always be positive and healthy. As such, ethics are a primary concern in youth development work. The purpose of ethics is to unify the field in terms of values and ideals and guide the expression of power so that actions remain congruent with the values of youth work (Peterson, Young, & Tillman, 1990). Ethics govern values, character, and behavior of youth professionals in an effort to help young people.

Young (1999) identified three approaches to ethics in youth work including: (1) concepts and values, (2) a code of professional ethics, and (3) consideration of the ethical issues and dilemmas which professionals encounter. In the words of Young (1999), "Central to these activities, is the ability to interpret the meaning of the concepts and values involved. In youth work, this includes concepts such as education, participation, empowerment, and equality of opportunity, and values such as justice and freedom" (p. 105).

Lebacqz (1985) noted that codes of ethics establish expectations for character, not actions. Codes present a picture of the character traits necessary for a youth professional to possess. Ethical decision-making is a necessary but complex process. Elsdon (1998) said that possessing self-awareness is key to making practical, responsible, ethical decisions. Garfat and Ricks (1995) suggested that critical thinking, accepting personal responsibility, considering alternative choices, and evaluating decisions are all aspects of ethical decision-making. In particular, Koenig (2004) stated that "social work practitioners, many of whom are women, confront unique practice situations on a daily basis. Social workers are also understood to predominantly use ethical relativism in making decisions in professional life" (p. 237).

Peterson (1992) discussed the necessity of relationship boundaries between youth and youth professionals given their inherently unequal positions of control and influence. Since boundary violations have such potential for damage to youth, however, it is necessary to prevent ethical violations from occurring in youth development work. Maintaining appropriate relationship boundaries provide "limits that protect the space between the professional's power and the client's vulnerability" (Peterson, 1992, p.4), and promote a safe place for youth to reveal themselves. One way to ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained in relationships is to allow for open and honest discussion of professional boundaries between and among both youth workers and young people.

In addition to the ethical issues, since youth professionals by virtue of their role have power to direct the lives of vulnerable youth, youth professionals need to have a better understanding of adultcentrism and ageism relating to supportive relationships-building with youth. The word, adultcentrism is defined as "the tendency of adults to view children and their problems from a biased, adult perspective" (Petr, 1992, p. 408). Petr (1992) also emphasized it as "a complex set of attitudes, values, and behaviors that can skew practitioners' relationships with children and thus negatively affect their work" (p. 408). Similarly, Bell (1996) used the term adultism and stated that it refers to "behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people are, and entitled to act upon young people without their agreement" (p.1). According to Delgado and Zhao (2008), adultism is defined as "the inherent belief that adults are the ultimate experts of youth, their issues, dreams, anxieties, abilities, and health; adults are thus thrust into positions of ultimate decision-makers and arbiters of policies, programs, and services involving youth." (p. 18).

This adult-centric mistreatment is reinforced by social institutions, laws, customs, and attitudes (Flasher, 1978). Adultism is a very real obstacle for children and youth (Tate & Copas, 2003). Adultism is characterized by "disrespect, negligence or abuse of the intelligence, judgement, emotional life, leadership, or physical being of young people" (Quiroz-Martinez, Wu, & Zimmerman, 2005, p. 9). Bell (1988, 1996, 2005) emphasized the understanding of adultism as a key to developing positive youth-adult relationships. In the words of Petr (1992), "The negative consequences of adultcentrism can be the same as those of ethnocentrism: miscommunication (with children), inaccurate judgments (about children's intents and motivations), misuse of power (to limit children's self-determination), and undermining strengths and competencies" (p. 409).

Professionals' responsibility to avoid relating in an adultist manner toward children and adolescents is further emphasized as their role gives them special power over those young people (Flasher, 1978; Petr, 1992). The way we view children certainly shapes our interactions and resulting relationships with young people. Adult actions that are encouraging , trustful, and empowering often lead to productive relationships with children. According to Tate and Copas, "Those productive relationships often serve as a springboard to the learning process and help children to confidently negotiate life's difficulties. On the other hand, adult actions that are discouraging, distrustful, and controlling often lead to unnecessary conflict, and severely impede the child's perspective problem-solving abilities" (p.41).

While adultism has been used specifically to focus on youth, the term ageism also has been used to describe the power imbalance between young people and adults. Although ageism is a term usually reserved for discrimination focused on elders, it is not restricted to this group (Macnicol, 2006). Sometimes, the term ageism is used to describe the power differential based

on age (Delgado & Staples, 2007). Franklin and Franklin (1990) have identified three dimensions of ageism (cultural, political, and economic) affecting both young people and old people. Central to their argument is the understanding that "power is not an attribute of individuals but an expression of a relationship between them" (p. 5). Ageism still continues to be a major social issue in many countries. According to Young (1999), "The ageism experienced by young people may be exacerbated by other forms of oppression deriving from their class, race, gender, sexuality, or disability" (p. 32)

Research on Positive Youth Development Practices

Positive youth development and resilience have gained prominence as ways to help children and adolescents become competent and responsible adults (Benard, 2004; Nixon, 1997; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). In particular, resiliency research during the past several years has supported the belief that positive youth development practice makes significant contributions to young people's learning and development. Benard (2004) acknowledges that "the most effective, efficient, and even rewarding and joyful approach to problem prevention is through supporting healthy youth development" (p. 2).

Powerful theoretical support exists for the benefits of positive youth development, and convincing evidence of those benefits is emerging (Sherrod, 1997; Zeldin, 2000). However, few studies have examined the meaning of strengths-based practice of positive youth development and the nature of the youth-adult worker relationships. The following literature review highlights the current trends related to the study of positive youth development practice and the youth-adult professional relationship that have helped to inform this study.

Positive Youth Development Practice

From a social welfare perspective, Morrison et al. (1997) studied the historical involvement of social welfare in positive youth development while incorporating recent theory and practice. Through literature reviews and qualitative case study of the Chicago Youth Agency Partnership Program, the authors examined the intended outcomes of youth development services and reasons why the social work profession reduced neighborhood-based youth development services. This study described current professional trends that support a revival of social work's involvement in positive youth development.

Melpignano and Collins (2003) explored ways to integrate a positive youth development approach into child welfare work through a Delphi survey with a purposive panel of sixteen academics/researchers and fourteen practitioners. According to the authors, "development relevant to addressing adolescent youth in the child welfare system has been increased attention to principles of positive youth development to help all youth to achieve successful life outcomes" (p. 160). The feasibility of positive youth development practice was analyzed, and the importance of positive youth development principles was emphasized. Findings illustrate the importance of a holistic approach in working with youth, as well as the importance of connection and relationship between youth and professional workers.

Through a conceptual review of the literature and examination of twenty-five youth development programs, Catalano et al. (2002) concluded that a wide range of positive youth development approaches can result in positive youth behavior outcomes and the prevention of youth problem behaviors. Nearly all of the programs (24 out of 25) showed evidence of success in reducing problem behaviors. The authors determined that the most effective programs address a variety of child and youth competencies and attempt to promote prosocial norms in various environmental settings or domains.

In a study of community youth programs, Heath and Soep (1997) used ethnographic methods to learn more about those programs which, according to local youths, provided the most effective and comfortable learning environments. The study was carried out in 30 regions of the U.S. and involved more than 120 local organizations that worked with more than 30,000 young people over the past decade. As participant-observers, the researchers studied the organizations and identified the best principles of practice when working with youth.

In a quantitative study, Huebner et al. (2003) suggested a framework for critical reflection on practices that encourage community-based youth workers to explore and apply the lessons of positive youth development in their programs. Survey data were collected from 153 participants of the Moving Ahead program with a 90% response rate. Moving Ahead is a staff development training program provided by federal agencies for youth development professionals. To examine program effects, differences in mean scores were compared between the pre-training and post-training responses. Paired sample *t*-test revealed significant differences among the participants' scores on survey questions. The importance of strengthening professional practice and hence the quality of youth development programs was emphasized.

Kemper, Spitler, Williams, and Rainey (1999) performed an agency survey to assess whether youth agencies incorporated success-promoting criteria into their youth programs. One hundred and eleven youth service agencies were identified through youth service directories and contacted by telephone. Then the agency assessment was conducted using a mailed survey and a follow-up face-to-face interview. The majority of the survey participants emphasized success criteria such as healthy self concept, success expectations, appropriate behaviors, and connectedness. Qualitative data obtained from the interviews also supported the survey findings with respect to importance of these success criteria to youth programs.

Research on Youth-Professional Relationships

As discussed in earlier sections, the relationships between youth participants and adult staff have been shown to be an important protective factor for strengths-based positive youth development (McLaughlin & Irby, 1994). The limited literature that does exist on youth professionals supports the notion that the relationships cultivated between youth and professionals are instrumental in influencing youth.

In their five years of field work, McLaughlin and Irby (1994) conducted research based on ethnographic methods of interview, observation, and document analysis. Their perspectives were located in the everyday realities of the individuals and organizations participating in the study. They selected three urban areas and spent extended time in more than sixty neighborhood-based organizations. They interviewed youth, youth workers, volunteers, and members of the community. They found that successful organizations had adults who created and nourished "places of hope" through their skills of listening to youth.

Halpern, Barker, and Mollard (2000) presented the findings of a year-long, qualitative study of a network of neighborhood youth programs in a low-income, Latino neighborhood in Chicago. This study involved two to three in-depth interviews with each of the 14 youth workers, as well as interviews with a sample of 4 or 5 participating youth in each of the programs, and weekly observations over an 8- to 10-week period in each of the five programs. They emphasized the fact that "the staff accepted the youth, tried to believe in them, and for the most part, genuinely liked them" (p. 502). Also, for those youth who were not the highest achievers, "having a space where one could be oneself (and have modest or undefined aspiration) may itself have been important" (p. 503).

In a recent qualitative study, Star (2003) explored the social and political theory-making of adults who work with urban youth of color, based on in-depth interviews with sixty-seven youth workers in eighteen U.S. cities. It focused on their choice to do the work they do, their vision of youth-adult relationships, and their political theories of race, poverty, family, and youths' behaviors. The findings showed that the youth workers have distinct theories about the proper relationship between youth and adults, with different emphases on discipline, tradition, and the nature of youths' worlds. The author emphasized that "youth workers see that the burden is on them as adults to figure out how to raise all the children rather than simply blaming youths' behavior" (p. 930).

Through a comprehensive study of six caring youth organizations and voices of individuals who organize care in communities, Rauner (2000) offered a rare focus on youth development as a process of experiencing care and learning social responsibility. She described the practice of caring for youth as the interplay of attentiveness, responsiveness, and competence. The caring, supportive dimension of youth-adult worker relationships is considered as a fundamental foundation for positive youth development.

A meta-analysis of 15 program evaluations conducted by Roth et al. (1998) supported the importance of caring youth-adult relationships as an essential element of successful programs. The authors synthesized results of existing reviews and task forces not only to identify what youth require to develop into healthy adults, but also to explore the extent to which such knowledge could be used to improve the quality and outcomes of youth development programs. The authors identified 3 broad developmental needs that must be met for the promotion of healthy youth development, including "safe places, challenging experiences, and caring people on a daily basis" (p. 427).

In interviews with 43 youth workers to understand what they needed to succeed in their professional work, Walker (2003) found that youth workers learn through hands-on practice as opposed to formal education or training. Youth workers used a variety of terms such as friend, advocate, resource, and role model to describe their relationship with young people. They also describe themselves as learners, change agents, visionaries, promoters, listeners, and problem solvers. The implications inherent in these terms reflect not only a challenge in building a common language of work and philosophy that brings youth workers together but also "the challenge of developing models of training and support" (p. 285).

In addition to studies on youth-professional relationships, evaluations of mentoring programs provide evidence that mentoring relationships can have positive influences on adolescent developmental outcomes, including improvements in peer and parent relationships, academic achievement, and self-concept, as well as lower recidivism rates among juvenile delinquents and reductions in substance abuse (Grossman, 2005; Grossman & Tierney, 1998; LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, & Taylor, 1996; McPartland & Nettles, 1991).

In one of the first evaluations to judge the effects of a well-financed program using adult advocates or mentors, McPartland & Nettles (1991) provided a research-based foundation (using comparison groups and statistical tests) for a discussion of programs that use adults from the community to assist the school success of at-risk youth. It provides some additional new perspectives on major practical and research questions. Positive effects are found on improving student attendance and grades in English, but not on promotion rates or standardized test scores. The effect, though sizable, was not sufficient to neutralize the academic risks with which students entered the program. Success may also depend on the size and composition of the

student group to be served. Issues are raised about roles and responsibilities of adult advocates or mentors.

Grossman and Johnson (1999) established benchmarks from the Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Sponsor-A-Scholar data. A large number of effects from the two programs were found for certain students and diminished for other groups. So, those who initially scored low in academic achievement, had high absentee rates, and had minimal family support experienced many improvements in academically related outcomes compared to those who were initially better off. Students in long-term mentoring experienced many improvements in academic outcomes and less substance use compared with those in relationships of shorter duration, with less frequent contact or relationships characterized by low levels of youth-centeredness. Grossman and Johnson found more positive effects among pairs who interacted frequently, in which the mentors sought the input of the youth, and in which the mentor did not take punitive approaches with the youth.

In an evaluation research on the Family Mentoring Project, Barron-McKeagney and colleagues (2001) reported the impact of mentoring on social skills and problem behaviors. The Family Mentoring Project (FMP) provides approximately one year of mentoring for at-risk 10-year old Latino children and their parents aimed to provide not only service but empirical evaluation of the program's impact. A pre-test and post-test analysis of 11 non-mentored and 20 mentored youth revealed positive gains on social skills for mentored children as reflected in self-ratings and mother's ratings on the Social Skill Rating Scales (SSRS). Also based on the SSRS, mothers reported decreases in three problem behaviors for mentored children.

Neglected Areas of Positive Youth Development Practices

The aforementioned qualitative and quantitative studies emphasize the importance of positive youth development practice and role of youth professionals in youth programs. As previously stated, it has been well documented that positive youth development practices can make positive contributions to children and youth. However, research on what youth professionals can do to support positive youth development remains little explored. Although conceptual articles recommend a strengths approach in youth work, few empirical studies have addressed the meaning of the strengths perspective and principles applied in the youth development practices. Most studies that explore the perception of positive youth development have targeted youth program situations and program effects for positive development of young participants.

Although some prior qualitative studies have included youth professionals' understanding of youth-adult relationships, no attention has been paid to the way the strengths perspective applies in these practices. While youth-adult worker relationships are identified as critical, the nature of these relationships has not yet been sufficiently investigated. Little research explored the challenges faced and strategies employed in developing a supportive youth-adult professional relationship. What have been neglected are the professionals' experiences and insights into the practice of achieving positive youth development, the views of the supportive youth-worker relationships, and benefits and challenges of strengths-based practice drawn from the youth professionals' perspectives.

The nature of youth professionals' influence on the lives of youth warrants further examination. As yet, little attention has been paid to the experience of youth professionals in the youth development field other than that of social workers in welfare agencies. Although prior studies indicate that many welfare agencies and youth professionals state that they practice

positive youth development and the strengths perspective, the field needs more understanding of what agencies and professionals actually do in the construction and implementation of their roles for positive youth development.

As already addressed in earlier chapter I, this study gives a better understanding of the nature of strengths-based practice in youth development field and social work with children and youth. This study hopes to provide insights about the way that youth professionals and social workers contribute to positive youth development and supportive youth-adult relationship building. By utilizing qualitative inquiry of youth professionals' experiences with positive youth development, this study also gives rich information about the benefits and challenges of youth professionals' practices.

Summary

This chapter synthesized the literature related to the study focusing on the evolution of the strengths-based practice in youth development field. This chapter reviewed the historical and contemporary contexts of the problem-focused perspectives on youth, and then developed a critique with emphasis of the evolution of a strengths perspective and positive youth development principles. The development and application of the strengths perspective and positive youth development principles were understood as guiding characteristics of the strengths-based youth development practice.

Since this study focuses on the strengths-based practice in youth development field, this chapter described key features of youth development programs and the roles of youth-serving organizations, followed by the significance of youth professionals' roles and youth-professional relationships. The benefits and challenges of the youth development practices and supportive youth-professional relationship buildings are discussed as well. The issues of qualified

professional staffing in the youth development field and ethical considerations in youth-professional relationships are addressed as well.

Previous research on positive youth development identified the significance of strengths-based youth development practices and the role of youth professionals in the lives of youth. However, few studies looked into youth professionals' experiences with youth development practices, supportive relationship building, and the challenges to successful strengths-based practices. In addition, few studies have been done from a social work perspective or through qualitative inquiries. This study contributes to fill the gaps in the neglected areas of the strengths-based youth development practices. A detailed qualitative methodology of the study is presented in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study explores youth professionals' understanding of positive youth development, their perspectives on relationships with young participants, and their perception of benefits and challenges of implementing strengths-based practice. Inspired by Starr's (2003) emphasis on "establishing a horizontal dialogue between research and youth workers' theories and experiences" (p. 911), this study examined the positive youth development issues through interviews with youth professionals in youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies with an educational background of social work and other disciplines. This study concludes with implications for social work practice with children and youth. According to Canda (2002), "One of the tenets of strengths-oriented empowerment research is that researchers should conduct studies that let people speak for themselves" (p. 76).

Rationale for the Research Design

Research Paradigm: Heuristic Paradigm and Naturalistic Inquiry

In order to understand the nature of positive youth development practice from the youth professionals' perspectives, this study is based on a heuristic paradigm. The heuristic paradigm of social work research holds that there is more than one right way to conduct scientific inquiry. In contrast to logical empiricism, the heuristic paradigm assumes multiple ways of knowing, each of which can provide valuable ideas and insights, and each of which has its limitations (Heineman-Pieper, Tyson, & Pieper, 2002). The heuristic paradigm allows the researcher to choose the design and method that best fit the research questions (Tyson, 1995).

In the words of Tyson (1992), "The focus of the heuristic paradigm is on advancing the understanding of the complex, changing, and diverse realities that social workers face. The

heuristic paradigm explains that the diverse research methods available to social workers are all heuristics" (p. 542). The heuristic paradigm is also consistent with the perspectives chosen for this study, and encourages the combination of multiple approaches to inquiry. The heuristic paradigm views values as an essential core in shaping inquiry (Lincoln, 1992). The researcher held respect for youth professionals' roles and practice of strengths-based youth development as core values, which are derived from the ecological views, empowerment models, the social goal model, and the strengths perspective. The heuristic paradigm also views knowledge as socially constructed. In addition to the researcher, participants are actively engaged in the construction of knowledge, and the construction process is part of the subject under inquiry.

This study utilizes the methods drawn from naturalistic inquiry that are consistent with this heuristic paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (1985, 2000) expressed that this paradigm presents distinctive assumptions about reality, objectivity, and generalization. Like the heuristic paradigm, the naturalistic paradigm is also founded on an ontological assumption that reality is construed in both a subjective and relative manner as it is perceived by the study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Rodwell, 1998).

This study is naturalistic in that it entails the study of practice experiences of youth professionals with their work or program implementation. The nature and meaning that the participants found in their subjective realities are uncovered by interviewing the participants (Schwandt, 1997). According to Patton (2002), "Open-ended, conversation-like interviews as a form of naturalistic inquiry contrast with questionnaires that have predetermined response categories" (p. 40).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the human instrument, utilization of tacit knowledge, and purposive sampling as some of the characteristics of the naturalistic paradigm. For example,

they emphasized the human instrument as the primary instrument for gathering data. They also stated that the naturalistic paradigm "prefers to negotiate meanings and interpretations with the human sources from which the data have chiefly been drawn" (p. 41). In naturalistic research, interviews often take the form of a dialogue or an interaction. According to Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993), interviews help "the researcher to understand and put into a larger context the interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects of the environment" (p. 85).

Therefore, the heuristic paradigm and naturalistic inquiry help the researcher explore the meaning and nature of strengths-based practices with children and youth that the youth professionals found in their youth work. This approach helps the researcher produce credible findings and interpretations since the researcher's personal values are consonant with the assumptions underlying the methodological paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000).

Rationale for Qualitative Design

In both the heuristic and naturalistic paradigms, it is important for the researcher to examine the values of the conceptual frameworks that support the inquiry. The conceptual foundation of this study is embedded in four conceptual traditions: ecological perspective, empowerment models, the social goals model, and the strengths perspective. As discussed earlier, the heuristic paradigm and naturalistic inquiry provide opportunities to advocate for children and youth as well as youth work for positive youth development.

A qualitative design is also selected for this study for some pragmatic reasons. First, as seen in the literature review, previous research about positive youth development has not been sufficient to produce a clear and detailed understanding of the nature of strengths-based practice of positive youth development from practitioners' viewpoints. Creswell (1998) argues that a qualitative study is suitable when a researcher has a research topic that needs to be explored

because little information exists on the topic. Rodwell (1998) also contends that a researcher should employ qualitative methods to investigate a complex subject where no single cause or combination of causes would be a sufficient explanation. Thus, in order to explore professionals' insights about the nature and principles of strengths-based practices, an exploratory qualitative inquiry is more appropriate, as it reflects their experiences and insights (Shaw & Gould, 2001). In the discussion of qualitative research, Fook (2001) emphasizes that "qualitative research may be needed to directly address perspectives which are lacking, so that practice can be improved" (p. 130).

Second, this study intends to obtain rich information about the youth-adult professionals' relationships based on strength-based practices from multiple perspectives in a setting through interpretation of individual experiences of youth professional participants. A qualitative design helps the researcher share in the understanding and perceptions of strengths-based practices when it applies to youth professionals' relationships with children and youth. Moreover, qualitative inquiry helps explore how youth professionals structure and give meaning to their practice wisdom of positive youth development related to the specific situation of a youth-adult relationship.

Third, it is apparent that the concept of positive youth development has largely been understood from academic studies rather than field experiences (Benson, 2003; Lerner et al. 2007). For example, the definition of positive youth development has largely been governed by conceptual approaches. Thus, it is important to determine through a qualitative inquiry how individuals define the terms "positive youth development" and "strengths perspective," so that youth professionals themselves can be involved in developing their own practice wisdom. The

development among children and youth does not always occur on its own. It is supported and facilitated by the hard work of youth professionals.

Restatement of Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to explore the way that youth professionals apply strengths-based practices in the positive youth development field. In this study, the following sets of questions are posed to lead the data collection and analysis.

Main research question: How do youth professionals trained in strengths-based practice and who work in youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies practice positive youth development as it relates to a strengths perspective?

Subsidiary research questions:

1. How do these youth professionals describe central guiding principles that direct their practice of positive youth development with the young people?

2. How do these youth professionals understand the nature of their relationships with young participants within the process of positive youth development practices?

3. What do these youth professionals perceive to be the benefits and challenges of their professional practice of strengths-based youth development?

4. What recommendations do these youth professionals offer for better strengths-based practice in positive youth development and social work with children and youth?

Key Concepts Definitions

The key concepts that guide this inquiry are youth professionals, youth-serving organizations, child welfare agencies, the strengths perspective, positive youth development, youth-adult worker relationships, and professional practice. In order to clarify the meaning of

some terms that are critical to this study, the key concept definitions and rationales for each definition are provided relating to each research question.

Youth professionals. Regarding the main research question, youth professionals are defined as workers who are engaged in one of the salaried positions authorized to facilitate and direct programs for children and youth. A bachelor's degree in human development, social work, or other helping professions is required, and a Master's degree is preferred. This definition includes areas where employees work with direct practice as a program leader, case manager, or counselor. They provide leadership primarily to children and teenage youth for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of youth work or programs. These professionals may also serve in administrative positions, as staff developmental personnel, and as curriculum developers (Broady, 1998).

Youth-serving organization. Youth-serving organizations are defined as those organizations - public, private, religious, and secular - that engage children and youth in structured, supervised informal activities during non-school hours. These activities develop skills, interests, and allegiances, offer opportunities for exploration and contribution, and meet basic needs for information, guidance and referrals, and sometimes family and social services (Pittman & Fleming, 1992). Most community-based youth development organizations are non-profit organizations and are government supported. Examples include the YMCA/YWCA, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.

Child welfare agencies. Child welfare agencies are defined as governmental and voluntary (primarily private, non-profit) administrative units responsible for social work with children and their families. In particular, private, non-profit child welfare agencies have an extensive history of providing services to children and families, and the non-profit sector has had a strong

influence on the development and direct provision of child welfare services. Though these agencies are locally administered, non-profits may be affiliated with national child welfare organizations as well (Landsman, 2001).

The strengths perspective. The strengths perspective is defined as an approach to social work practice that places its emphasis on the individual's inner and environmental strengths and resources instead of deficiencies and problems. It is underlined by the belief that people are more empowered in the helping process when their knowledge, talents, abilities, and unique attributes are recognized and used as a basis for improving their life conditions (Glicken, 2004; Rapp, 1998; Sullivan, 1992). Strengths can take many different forms: aspiration, motivation, social support, ingenuity, intelligence, skills, family legacy, and community resources.

Positive youth development. The first research question focuses on the term "positive youth development." Positive youth development is defined here as an ongoing process in which all youths between the age of 10 and 18 endeavor to meet their basic needs for safety, caring relationships, and connections to the larger community to become productive individuals capable of accepting responsibility for self and others. Positive youth development places particular emphasis on the existence of healthy conditions, and expands the concepts of health to include the skills, pro-social behaviors, and competencies needed to succeed in employment, education, and civic life (Bazemore & Terry, 1997; Pittman et al., 2003).

Youth-professional relationship. The second research question emphasizes the nature of the youth-adult professional relationship. A youth-adult professional relationship is defined as the interactive relationship between young participants of the programs and adult staff or employees in the youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies. The relationships that form between youth and staff workers of youth development programs can facilitate personal support and

monitoring (Kahne & Bailey, 1999; McLaughlin & Irby, 1994). While program activities initially attract youth, what often keeps them coming back are their relationships with the staff (Merry, 2000). For young people, “relationships with adults form the critical pathways for their learning; education ‘happens’ through relationships” (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 121).

Professional practice. The key concept related to the third research question is professional practice. Practices are the specific ways that stakeholders act and behave within organizations or agencies. Practices are also “the actions that directly touch young people or families or directly influence how staff are selected, programs are designed and decisions made” (Pitman & Zeldin, 1995, p. 6). Professional practice is defined as all services and practicing actions implemented and provided by salaried staff of youth-serving organizations and/or child welfare agencies. Engaging in practice may involve elements of knowledge, belief, judgment, skills, dispositions, and feelings. In any given practice, these elements intertwine and interact, the whole constituting the very nature of the practice.

Phases of Inquiry

Major activities of qualitative research involve several phases of inquiry including research design refinement, data collection, data analysis, and report writing. Lincoln and Guba (1985) divided the process of naturalistic inquiry into three phases: orientation and overview, focused exploration, and member check phase. The researcher conducts an overview of the research, literature review, outlining of research questions, and gains entry to the research site in the initial orientation phase. The protocol developed in the initial stage is used to collect data in the second phase of focused exploration. In the final phase, the researcher writes a report after conducting a final member check to confirm that the data was constructed in a way that matches how the informants interpreted their experience.

This study had four main phases based on a modification of the model suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This includes 1) research design refinement, 2) data collection, 3) data analysis, and 4) completion of the study. The schedule plan of each phase is shown in Appendix A. All phases of the study are iterative and have spiral processes without any linear distinctive stages. Data collection, data analysis, and question refinement are interwoven (Rodwell, 1998). Data analysis began during the data collection process.

In the initial research refinement phase, literature reviews to develop an understanding of the subject, the identification of the individuals knowledgeable about the subject, and constitution of consultant panels were conducted. The development of a tentative interview guide, consent form and an application to the Human Subject Committee-Lawrence (HSCL) were also included in the first phase. The second phase focused on data collection through semi-structured in-depth interviews with 18 research participants, as described in detail in the upcoming data collection section. The third phase included development of a preliminary coding guide, completion of data reduction and analysis, synthesis of the data, and member checking. The summarized findings and tentative conclusions were provided to all participants for feedback. The final phase began with synthesizing findings and preliminary report writing. The summarized findings were discussed with the consultant panels and the preliminary report was discussed with the methodologist and chair of the dissertation committee. After confirmation of the findings and preliminary report, the final report was written and disseminated to the dissertation committee.

Methodology for Data Collection

Data Sources

The primary source of data for this study was the interviews with 18 youth work professionals. The participants in this study were professional staff of youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies in a metropolitan area of the U.S. To be eligible, subjects had to be experienced in the direct practice of positive youth development for at least three years to give meaningful insight on the research questions.

In addition to the interview data, field notes, a reflexive journal, and a methodological log were used as supplementary data sources as suggested by Rodwell (1998), who applies the naturalistic/constructivist perspective of Lincoln and Guba (1985) to social work research. Field notes recorded demographic information, the time, place, and date of the interview, impressions of the participants' demeanor, attitude, body language, and other environmental information of the interview. A reflexive journal documented clarifications and personal insights related to the subject under investigation.

Interviews with Participants

This study was implemented by semi-structured, open-ended, face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 18 youth work professionals. First, the interview guide was prepared. Second, formal face-to-face interview were tape-recorded with the permission of the participants. Third, the possibility of having a follow-up interview was mentioned at the initial interviews with all 18 participants. However, follow-up interviews were conducted with four participants as additional information on the newly emerged themes of their interviews became necessary. Fourth, field notes were taken during the interviews. Fifth, each interview was transcribed. The transcripts were stored as computer files at a secure computer. The researcher checked the accuracy of the transcription.

Interviews with 15 youth professionals including eight social workers and seven non social workers were primarily held at participants' offices. The other three participants (one social worker and two non social workers) had interviews at places other than offices including a public library and other quite places in participants' office buildings due to privacy or scheduling reasons for the participants. The first interviews took an average of 82 minutes with a range from 73 to 89 minutes. The follow-up interviews with four participants were also held at participants' office and took an average of 34 minutes with a range from 28 to 40 minutes.

Instrumentation for Data Collection

The interview guide was constructed for youth professionals to facilitate the interview process. The guide included warm-up questions, key questions, probes to follow the key questions, and spaces for written recording of the comments. The tentative interview questions was initially derived from the reviewed literature, and then reviewed by the members of two consultation panels and the dissertation committee members. One panel consisted of four members at the University of Kansas with expert knowledge on the strengths perspective and the other panel consisted of four directors of two youth-serving organizations and two child welfare agencies (which will be explained later in detail). After getting feedback from the consultation panels and dissertation chair and methodologist, the revised interview guide was pilot-tested with two youth professionals who are working at a youth development organization and a social service agency respectively and applying strengths-based practice as the researcher had known for a number of years. Finally, after interview with the first participant, the interview guide was finalized and used consistently.

The participants were asked about topics that relate to the research questions. The topics included the description of current job, the definitions of the strengths perspective and positive

youth development, the identification of practice principles, roles of youth professionals, descriptions of youth-adult relationships, the perceptions of the benefits and challenges of the strengths-based practices, and suggestions for social work practice and education. Although some participants were not familiar with social work, questions on social work practice and education were asked to all participants. Suggestions for youth development work were also asked to all participants regardless of their educational background of social work or other disciplines. The professionals were also asked to identify the aspects that hinder them from implementing a strengths-based approach to practice.

Some of the questions included the following: What do the terms “strengths” or “strengths-based” mean to you? What does the term “positive youth development” mean to you and your organization/agency? What are your basic guiding principles that you apply in your work with young participants? What do you believe an effective youth-adult relationship should look like? Please make suggestions for social work education that would better promote the positive youth development practice? Please make suggestions for youth professionals to promote the youth development practice? Additional semi-structured questions are provided in the interview guide, labeled as Appendix B.

Sampling

Purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to maximize the variation in the perspectives of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, youth professionals in youth-serving organizations were identified and it was decided that the sample should include social workers and non social work youth professionals. Although youth-serving organizations are dominantly staffed with non-social workers, in order to identify better implications for the social work profession, youth professionals with social work educational backgrounds comprised nine

participants in the recruitment process. In addition, since youth-serving organizations have few professional social workers in them (Morrison et al., 1997), social workers in child welfare agencies who have implemented youth development programs were purposively sampled to address this gap.

In order to make best of both perspectives of social workers and non social work youth professionals, the remainder of the sample consisted of professionals with educational backgrounds other than social work. Although social workers with experiences of positive youth development practices are preferred, half of the sample included non-social work youth professionals. Social workers are expected to provide different information than non-social workers about the research questions, and in particular about the social work profession's contribution to positive youth development. Non-social work youth professionals who are working at youth-serving organizations are expected to provide data and meaningful information about youth development practice.

Maximum variation. Purposive sampling was used to ensure a sample with diverse characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, and educational level. In order to get maximum variation of perspectives regarding the research questions, the research aimed to collect data from participants with a variety of demographic characteristics including gender, ethnicity, and educational level.

Although more female participants are expected in the sample than male since many of youth professionals are women, gender difference among the participants allows the researcher to examine differences among male and female professionals. For example, a growing body of literature points to relationships with adult women, as being especially important to the healthy development of adolescent girls (Rhodes, Davis, Prescott, & Spencer, 2007; Sanchez & Colon,

2005; Sullivan, 1996; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Variety in race also assists in understanding the professionals' experiences within the context of various ethnic cultures. In particular, mentoring programs may prefer to make same-race matches (Bogat & Liang, 2005; Grossman & Tierney, 1998) although some articles suggest that cross-race matches are nearly as likely as same-race matches to form positive relationships (Slicker & Palmer, 1993).

The experiences and roles of the professionals are also expected to vary by the educational level. In order for professional practices to be effective, it is vitally important that the youth professionals be appropriately educated and trained with the necessary knowledge and skills. In general, youth professionals have educational credentials, however, "they lack a common core of knowledge and experiences that integrate learning and work" (Walker, 2003, p. 377). Recent studies on youth professionals and youth work indicates that youth workers learned what they know today and practical knowledge primarily by hands-on practice and discovery on the job (Madzey-Akale, & Walker, 2000; National Training Institute for Community Youth Work, 2002, Walker & Larson, 2006).

In order to ensure this maximum variation of perspective and the strengths-based practice of positive youth development in their knowledge and experience**,** potential participants were recruited among the youth professionals who have been trained by participating workshops or training sessions on positive youth development or the strengths perspective and used the strengths-based practices for at least three years from the two associational organizations that the researcher contacted for referrals. These two organizations are private not-for-profit corporations dedicated to services and advocacy for positive youth development and strengths-based case management. One organization provides workshops on the strengths perspective for youth professionals, and the other organization provides training on strengths-based case management

to case managers and other agency staff. These two organizations maintain databases of their workshop and training participants. This study collected data of a variety of demographic characteristics including ethnicity and educational level. A description of participants' characteristics as well as a comparison between social work youth professionals and non social work professionals are provided in Chapter 4.

Participant recruitment. To begin the participant recruitment process, the researcher contacted the director and staff of the two organizations in person to give a description of the research. After contacting the director and staff of the two organizations, the researcher had a meeting with the staff in charge of workshop and training programs on positive youth development and the strengths-based case management.

The staff were asked to select the potential participants to personally contact from their training participants after considering eligibility of the study and variation in gender, ethnicity, and educational level. When the staff had identified potential participants showing an interest in the study, the staff explained the research purpose and procedure orally. If potential participants were interested in participating in the study, staff members obtained oral permission from potential participants to be contacted by the researcher for possible participation in the study.

As a researcher on projects implemented through the doctoral classes at the University of Kansas, the author has contacted directors and professional staff who are working at these two intermediary organizations and has developed cooperative relationships since 2003. Within the past four years, the researcher also attended workshops on positive youth development and the strengths-based case management training. This experience and these relationships made recruitment for this research feasible.

Sample size. In qualitative research, "There are no rules for sample size" (Patton, 2002; p. 244). Sample size depends on the study and the researcher looks more for information richness rather than information volume (Erlandson et al., 1993). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "In purposeful sampling the size of the sample is determined by informational considerations" (p. 202). Creswell (1998) suggests an in-depth interview with 10 individuals for a phenomenological study and recommends "a grounded theorist interview 20 to 30 individuals" (p. 122).

The total sample size of 18 participants was sufficient to develop rich description of the research questions. Further, saturation was found. Saturation is defined as "data adequacy" and operationalized as collecting data until no new information significant for research questions was obtained (Morse, 1995). Kvale (1996) states that "new interviews might be conducted until a point of saturation, where further interviews yield little new knowledge" (p. 102). In addition to the number of study participants, region and time available to study are also related to saturation (Flick, 1998; Morse, 1995; Patton, 2002).

Protection of Human Subjects

The research followed the guidelines set by the Human Subject Committee-Lawrence (HSCL) and received approval from HSCL prior to any contact with potential study participants. During the recruitment process described earlier, the staff of the two associational organizations obtained oral permission from 20 youth professionals including five social workers (one organization) and 29 youth professionals including 12 social workers (the other organization) respectively (thus total 49 youth professionals from two organizations) to release their contact information to the researcher. In order to protect the identity of the final selection of the participants, 18 of the 49 study participants were selected by the researcher. All 18 contacted professionals agreed on the participation in the study.

The researcher contacted each of those 18 participants by email, telephone, or in person to explain the study in more detail and to verify the intent to participate in the study (see Appendix C). If those prospective participants agreed to participate, screening questionnaires and informed consent forms were obtained prior to the interviews. The screening questionnaire is provided in Appendix D. The actual consent form addressed the following: participants' right to voluntarily withdraw from the study at any time, the central purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in data collection, comments about protecting the confidentiality of the respondents, a statement about known risk associated with participants, and a place for them to sign and date the form (see Appendix E).

In order to protect the participants, all interview records and products such as tape recordings, field notes, transcripts, and reflective logs were kept in a secure place and the transcriber was instructed to maintain confidentiality. All materials for analysis used codes instead of identifying information. The data generated through the interviews and field notes were expected to be voluminous, so in order to develop a good data storage system, the computer program *ATLAS.ti* was used to organize, store, and retrieve the data.

Methodology for Data Analysis

Plan for Data Analysis

Analytic process. Since data collection and data analysis are inseparable in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), data analysis began with data collection. As Erlandson et al. (1993) indicated, "The analysis of qualitative data is best described as a progression, not a stage; an ongoing process, not a one time event" (p. 111). Through these intertwined processes, the understanding of themes was developed and facilitated.

The transcripts from interviews with 18 youth professionals were the primary sources of data analysis. Other data included field notes, transcripts of the consultant panel meetings, and researcher's reflections of the interviews. In particular, interview-type data allow the researcher to understand a larger context of the agency environment (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After reading the transcripts of the interviews, the data were coded and categorized according to emerging themes (LeCompte, 2000; McCormack, 2000).

After the analysis of all data was completed, interviewed youth professionals received a preliminary report of findings. Participants then provided the researcher with feedback regarding the study findings. For example, one participant said, "My organization does not have gospel missions. The gospel missions are separate from us. The rest of the information within the paragraph is correct." Another participant described, "Aside from the few slight modifications that I made on page 1 of the summary (enclosed), there is no need for changes or additions."

The coding scheme was revised five times. Proofreading of the transcripts and field notes yielded a tentative list of code categories for each theme. The tentative coding scheme was also developed based on the research questions, interview questions, and literature review. The coding scheme was tested through coding four transcripts and then revised based on the new themes and categories that had emerged. The final coding scheme is provided in Appendix F.

Consultation panels. Three meetings with each of two consultation panels were held during the research process to refine the interview guide (first meeting), elicit feedback about tentative analysis (second meeting) and respond to a preliminary report of finding (third meeting). One panel consisted of four persons who are working for over six years at the Office of Social Policy and Analysis (OSPA) at the University of Kansas where the researcher has been participating in the research projects since 2002. The group members are made up of one director, two research

staff, and one doctoral student at the University of Kansas. This group helped the researcher by giving advice based on its expert knowledge on the subject, and in particular about the strengths perspective.

The other panel consisted of three directors of three youth organizations and one associate director of a child welfare agency who ran youth development programs for at least six years. In contrast to the OSPA group focusing on the strengths perspective, this youth field work panel was expected to provide its theoretical and practical insight of the positive youth development principles. All the meetings with both panels were tape-recorded with the permission using consent forms of the study participants and included in analysis.

Constant Comparative Analysis

The constant comparative method of analysis was employed to conceptualize and identify patterns of themes and variations within themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The constant comparative method is "the process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories" (Creswell, 1998, p. 57). The constant comparative method is very useful in order to generate and refine understanding based on themes and patterns of similarity and difference (Creswell, 1998). Major themes and sub-themes were identified to illustrate the perspectives of the participants. A tentative list of code categories for each theme was developed by reading the transcripts three times. As the researcher was coding the transcripts, new themes and sub-themes continuously emerged and final coding categories were developed.

Deductive and Inductive Data Analysis

Coding categories were derived through the interaction between inductive and deductive data analysis. First, qualitative analysis is typically inductive in the early stages, especially when figuring out possible categories, patterns, and themes (Patton, 2000). Strauss and Corbin (1998)

called this “open coding” (p. 223) to emphasize the importance of being open to the data. The next step is axial coding to refine and differentiate the categories resulting from open coding. From the multitude of categories that were originated, those are selected that seem to be most promising for a further elaboration (Flick, 2006).

Second, although inductively focused analysis is used, deductive reasoning is also employed. According to Patton (2002), “Once patterns, themes, and/or categories have been established through inductive analysis, the final, confirmatory stage of qualitative analysis may be deductive in testing and affirming the authenticity and appropriateness of the inductive content analysis” (p. 454). The questions for the research topic are initially determined based on a literature review, and the study findings are compared to the existing literature as deductive reasoning involved in this study (Wolcott, 2001). The interview guide and tentative coding categories are based on deductive reasoning, but both are subject to inductive analysis to be sure that the codes are compared and contrasted with inductive codes that emerged from the data.

Importantly, the depth of the analysis involves a considerable time commitment. Upon completion, this study produces detailed findings of the youth professionals’ contribution to the positive youth development practice including the meaning of positive youth development, the nature of youth-adult worker relationship, and the benefits and challenges of strengths-based practice. Implications are also provided for better social work practice with children and youth.

As explained in the following section, member checking was conducted throughout data collection and analysis. Participants were provided with written key findings and the researcher contacted each participant to get feedback by email or phone. This feedback was invaluable in confirming or refuting tentative conclusions. Also, two consultant panels were provided with tentative findings to further confirm participants’ responses and interpretations.

Using ATLAS.ti as a Tool for Data Analysis

The original transcripts of each participant were saved as a Microsoft Word file. The individual names of the participants were coded (such as Y1, Y2, S1, S2) and used pseudonyms in the analysis. Once all the transcripts are coded, *ATLAS.ti* made it easy to retrieve the data according to various categories or combination of categories. All statements about major themes and sub-themes from an individual interview were sorted and examined to see how they reflect the perspective of the respondents. The researcher made an outline of these themes that organized the respondents' perspectives. The similarities and differences between participants were identified to organize the comparison across all the differing perspectives. The efficient and effective methods of data storage and management through *ATLAS.ti* also enhanced the researcher's ability to organize an audit trail.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness supports the rigor of qualitative research by showing that it is conducted in a systematic and careful manner (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 2000). A set of four criteria is used to evaluate trustworthiness: "true value" through credibility, consistency through dependability, neutrality through confirmability, and applicability through transferability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Erlandson et al., 1993).

Credibility

Credibility is a determination of whether the research provides a realistic portrayal of participants and other data sources. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), qualitative researchers "routinely employ member checking, triangulation, thick description, peer reviews, and external audits" (p. 124). In this study, credibility was addressed through triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking.

Triangulation. The data collected were triangulated to provide the fullest picture of youth professionals' contribution to positive youth development. Triangulation is a process by which collected data are examined from different points of views (Creswell & Miller, 2000). By triangulating, the researcher can ensure the best representation of occurrences as well as the strongest information about the strategies used. The individual interviews with youth professionals constituted one type of data. A second data was linkage with literature. The meetings with two consultant panels constituted the third data. The data were also triangulated linking transcripts with field notes. Social workers' perspective was compared to the perspectives of non social work participants.

Peer debriefing. As indicated by Rodwell (1998), "Peer debriefing involves working with a peer who is uninvolved with the inquiry process, but knowledgeable enough about the methodology" (p. 99). In this study, the aforementioned consultation panels assisted in peer debriefing. The two panels consisted of persons who know the research topics and methodology. They also worked either in the social welfare field with the strengths perspective (OSPA panel) or the positive youth development field (youth field panel). These two groups helped the researcher by giving advice and insight based on their expert knowledge on the subject and their own experience either as research professionals or youth work professionals. As discussed earlier, an initial briefing session was done with each group to refine the interview guides. The next meetings were conducted during the data analysis process in order to help the researcher achieve a synthesis of meaning and discuss tentative findings. The final meeting was held with available four members of two groups to complete findings and analysis.

Member checking. As mentioned in the previous section, this technique is used to test findings and interpretations with the participants. No data obtained through the study are

included that cannot be verified through member checks (Erlandson et al., 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe member checks as “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). All participants were consulted to determine if the researcher had an accurate understanding of their statements during and at the end of the interview. For final member checking, each participant was provided with written key findings of their responses in order to facilitate correction, verification, and clarification of the finding and analysis.

All 18 participants responded to the member checking process and 18 written or oral responses were obtained. All participants agreed with the researcher’s interpretation. For example, participants responded to the written summary in writing, “These definitions appear to be very serviceable,” “The respective roles of service-provider and youth are well described,” “This is a good list of benefits and challenges,” and “I like that the need for more training was mentioned.” Member checks were also conducted with the two consultation panels. The summary of preliminary report for final member checking is provided in Appendix G.

Dependability

As Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, methodological instability and emergent design-induced changes are accounted for and tracked through dependability. In this study, a methodology log was kept to record methodological considerations, decisions, and justifications for this study. Periodical self-auditing concerning research methods, tools and analysis was performed. An independent, external methodologist also conducted audits to assure that “no one questions the integrity of the audit” (Rodwell, 1998, p. 200). An audit trail was kept for reviewing previous steps.

Confirmability

An organized audit trail facilitates a high quality product for analysis and permits tracing back to the original data so that conclusions may be verified. In establishing an audit trail, Creswell and Miller (2000) state that "researchers provide clear documentation of all research decisions and activities" (p. 128). Confirmability, like dependability, is supported through an audit (Erlandson et al., 1993). The dissertation methodologist reviewed the audit trail in each phase of the study. The audits were conducted two times. The first was held after the completion of coding all transcripts. The second audit was done after the final consultation panel met to confirm findings.

In this study, the audit trail was classified into six categories with the following materials: (1) Raw data: audiotapes, interview transcripts, field notes, and sampling process; (2) Data reduction and analysis: the code sheet, notes on personal reflection of the research process, notes about researcher's idea, and member checking; (3) Data reconstruction and synthesis: categorizations of themes and findings, charts of relationships and patterns, notes from consultations, and drafts of written reports; (4) Process notes: member checking notes, consultation panel feedback notes, and methodological notes; (5) Intention and disposition: research proposal, research agreement, and correspondence; and (6) Instrument development: a final interview guide, and drafts for final version of report. The audit trail contents are provided in Appendix H.

Transferability

Transferability can be described as the extent to which the research findings can be applied in other contexts or with other respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Rodwell (1998), "Transferability allows for the possibility that information created and lessons learned in one context can have meaning and usefulness in another" (p. 101). In this study, the detailed and

rich description derived from the transcribed interviews and field notes provided information to present detailed accounts of participants' views, as well as to learn about the environment and context in which the study was conducted. This description helps other researchers examine the relevance to other contexts. Purposive sampling of youth professionals within the social work profession and other educational backgrounds made it possible to compare the findings of the study between those two groups. This generated new understandings and implications for the social work profession.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. First of all, this study is limited in terms of its statistical generalizability because of the nature of the sampling method in a naturalistic inquiry of a qualitative design. This study does not intend to provide findings that can be generalized to a large population in a statistical sense. However, they can provide important insights for similar studies (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The findings based on this qualitative study have analytical generalizability (Yin, 1989, 2003). The rich descriptions in the study findings will provide enough information on the environment and context to apply to other settings.

Second, although there is little research to assess the perceptions of professional staff about youth program practices, a comparison of this result with youth participants' outcome could yield a better understanding of strengths-based practice. Although youth are not included in the study sample, it is recommended that future investigations on the meaning of strengths-based practices be conducted with young participants in youth development programs to get more insightful understanding of youth-professional relationship building.

Third, the representation of the sample can be discussed. Although this study includes youth professionals in child welfare agencies since youth-serving organizations have little social

worker professionals, some agencies might be unclear in terms of their objective descriptions of positive youth development principles and the strengths perspective. However, this study targets youth professionals and their personal experiences of working with youth development programs in their professional practices rather than their agency characteristics.

Summary

This study was a qualitative study on youth-serving professionals' practice experiences with strengths-based positive youth development. The study focused on youth professionals' understanding of (1) practice principles of positive youth development, (2) the youth-adult relationship as one of the keys to successful youth development practice, and (3) the benefits and challenges of professional practice. To that end, this study reviewed literature focusing on the evolution and converging characteristics of the positive youth development principles and strengths perspective.

This chapter addressed the rationale for the qualitative research design, methodology for data collection, analysis of the data, and trustworthiness of the study. First, the use of a heuristic paradigm and naturalistic inquiry drew insights about the meaning of strengths-based practice in the youth development field. Second, detailed descriptions of the procedures for the data collection and analysis are provided. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 18 research participants are conducted and data collection and analysis are interwoven through the processes. Third, various measures are taken to protect the rigor of the study and to safeguard the trustworthiness that directly lead to the authenticity of findings. Finally, statistical generalizability, lack of youth perspectives, and representation of sample are addressed as limitation of the study.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

Introduction

The findings presented here are based on interviews with 18 youth professional participants in youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies. Among participants, nine were professionals with educational backgrounds in social work and nine were youth professionals with other educational disciplines. Several major themes emerged from the interviews and these themes are discussed with regard to the four research questions: (1) youth professionals' descriptions of the meaning of strengths-based youth development and their guiding practice principles; (2) youth professionals' understandings of effective youth-adult professional relationships; (3) youth professionals' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of their professional practice of strengths-based youth development; and (4) youth professionals' recommendations for better strengths-based practice in youth development and social work with children and youth.

Characteristics of the Participants

This chapter begins with a description of the participants' characteristics, including demographic, youth-related career, and training experiences on strengths-based practices. Social work participants and youth professionals with other disciplines (non social workers) will be described separately and then compared.

Youth Professionals with Non-Social Work Education

This study included nine youth professionals with educational backgrounds in other disciplines than social work at youth-serving organizations. Of the nine non social work participants, five were male and four were female. Six participants were Caucasian and others were African American, Hispanic, and Asian American respectively. Their ages ranged from 28

to 47 years old with a mean age of 37.3. Their employing youth-serving organizations include two nationally well-known youth mentoring organizations, two state-level governmental organizations, one intermediary (associational) organization, and four other local youth agencies or organizations. Two of the nine participants work at organizations primarily serving Latina/Latinos and the other seven participants' organizations serve all youth populations regardless of race and ethnicity.

All nine respondents had participated in training on positive youth development or the strengths perspective. As a result of this training, it was assumed that they have been trained in strengths-based practice. The year of their training participation ranged from 1995 to 2004 with a mean of at least 6.2 years of strengths-based practices. In addition to the training experience, all nine participants answered that they obtained information about the strengths perspective or positive youth development through their work at youth-serving organizations and research journals or materials, and participation in other conferences or institutes. The nine participants' total number of years in professional work ranged from seven years to twenty three years with a mean of 13.1 years. Four participants had achieved a bachelor's level degree, and five participants had master's degree as their highest level of education. Their majored disciplines include education, theology, economics, management, urban development, liberal arts, cultural studies, human relations, and counseling and guidance. The characteristics of the non social work participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of Participants – Non Social Workers

Name*	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Year of Training on SBP**	Main Sources of SBP Knowledge	Career Years	Education (field)	Highest Degree	Organization/ Agencies
David (Y01)	Male	37	Asian American	1995 (12 years)	Institutes	13	Theology	MA	Intermediary organization
Harry (Y02)	Male	38	Hispanic	2003 (4 years)	On-the-job/ Publication	10	Economics	BA	Community youth agency
Diane (Y03)	Female	45	Caucasian	2004 (3 years)	On-the-job	23	Management	MS	Child, family state agency
Jim (Y04)	Male	30	Caucasian	2001 (6 years)	Hands-on Practice	8	Urban Development	MPA	Mentoring organization
Mia (Y05)	Female	28	African American	2000 (7 years)	Institutes	12	Liberal Arts	BA	Governmental agency
Tom (Y06)	Male	41	Caucasian	1999 (8 years)	Organizations	21	Christian Education	BA	Faith-based youth center
Rita (Y07)	Female	34	Caucasian	2001 (6 years)	Training/ Publication	9	English/ Cultural Studies	MA	Youth-serving organization
Mary (Y08)	Female	47	Caucasian	2000 (7 years)	Journals/ Conference	7	Management/ Human Relation	MA	Mentoring organization
Doug (Y09)	Male	36	Caucasian	2004 (3 years)	Books/Articles	15	Counseling & Guidance	MA	Community youth agency

Notes. * Names are all pseudonyms and listed according to the order of the interviews; ** SBP: Strengths-based practice (The strengths perspective and/or positive youth development).

Youth Professionals with Social Work Education

Nine social workers who had experiences of working for children and youth in youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies were interviewed for the study. Of the nine social work participants, two were male and seven were female. Seven professionals were Caucasian, one was African-American, and one was Hispanic. Their ages ranged from 28 to 52 years old with a mean age of 40.8. Agencies and youth-serving organizations at which the participants are currently working in include one nationally well-known youth mentoring organization, one local youth-serving organization, one state-level governmental agency, one intermediary (associational) organization, and four non-profit community organizations, and one school social worker.

All nine participants had been educated or trained in the strengths perspective or positive youth development through university education or training opportunities. The year of their participation in training sessions ranged from 1998 to 2004 with a mean of at least 6.2 years of strengths-based practices. Four participants had a Bachelors of Social Work degree (BSW) from a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education. Four participants had both a Bachelors and a Master of Social Work degree (MSW) and one participant had a master's degree in other major than social work. Three participants are currently working for children and youth at youth-serving organizations as case managers. One participant is a school social worker. Four participants are working at social agencies for children and their families. One participant is working at a community-based youth center. However, all participants had been practicing youth development work in the youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies throughout their career for at least three years. The characteristics of the social work participants are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Characteristics of Participants – Social Workers

Name*	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnicity	Year of training on SBP**	Sources of SBP Knowledge	Career Years	Education other than Social Work	Highest Degree	Agencies
Sarah (S01)	Female	30	Caucasian	2002 (5 years)	University	9	Social work only	MSW	Intermediary Organization
Cora (S02)	Female	32	Caucasian	2004 (3 years)	University Practicum	4	Social Work only	MSW	School social worker
Amy (S03)	Female	28	Caucasian	2002 (5 years)	University/ On Job	7	Social Work only	BSW	Mentoring organization
Pam (S04)	Female	48	Hispanic	2002 (5 years)	University Publication	18	Children/Families	MSW	State welfare agency
Kati (S05)	Female	46	Caucasian	1998 (9 years)	On-Job	25	Social Work only	MSW	Community center
Cathy (S06)	Female	48	Caucasian	1998 (9 years)	Training	9	Social Work only	BSW	Community youth agency
Bob (S07)	Male	41	African American	1998 (9 years)	Training	14	Social Work only	BSW	Community center
Linda (S08)	Female	42	Caucasian	2002 (5 years)	On-Job	18	Criminal Justice	BSW	Child, Family/ Non-profit
Tim (S09)	Male	52	Caucasian	2001 (6 years)	Training/ Publication	20	Secondary Education	MS	Community development

Notes. * Names are all pseudonyms and listed according to the order of the interviews; ** SBP: Strengths-based practice (The strengths perspective and/or positive youth development).

Comparison of Participants' Characteristics

In order to include both perspectives of social workers and non social work professionals for strengths-based youth development practice, this study employed sampling of social workers and non-social workers. Comparison of the characteristics of both groups of youth professionals helped the readers to understand a broad picture of each group. As already described, seven of the social work participants are women, whereas four participants are female non social work professionals. Overall, more women (61.1%) have participated in the study than male participants (38.9%).

Table 3

Comparison of Characteristics of Non Social Work and Social Work Participants

		Non Social Worker (n=9)	Social Worker (n=9)	Total (n=18) (%)
Gender	Female	4	7	11 (61.1)
	Male	5	2	7 (38.9)
Age	20-29	1	1	2 (11.1)
	30-39	5	2	7 (38.8)
	40-49	3	5	8 (44.4)
	50-59	0	1	1 (5.7)
	Mean	37.3	40.8	39.1
Race/Ethnicity	Caucasian	6	7	13 (72.2)
	Hispanic	1	1	2 (11.1)
	African American	1	1	2 (11.1)
	Asian American	1	0	1 (5.6)
Sources of Strengths-based Practice Knowledge	University	0	4	4 (22.2)
	Training	4	3	7 (38.9)
	On-the-job	4	2	6 (33.3)
	Others	1	0	1 (5.6)
Career Years	Under 5	0	1	1 (5.5)
	6-10	4	3	7 (38.9)
	11-15	3	1	4 (22.2)
	16-20	0	3	3 (16.7)
	21-25	2	1	3 (16.7)
	Mean	13.1	13.8	13.4
Education	Bachelor	3	4	7 (38.9)
	Master	6	5	11 (61.1)

Age groups were compared by 10 years intervals: 20-29, 30-39, 40-49, and 50-59. Social work participants on average (40.8 years) were older than non social workers (37.3 years). Five social work participants were in the 40-49 age group, whereas five non social work participants were in the 30-39 age group. Six of the non social work professionals were Caucasian, and three were people of color. Seven of the social work participants were Caucasian, one was African American, and one was Hispanic. Thus 72.2% of all participants were Caucasian and 27.8% were Hispanic, African American, and Asian participants.

Participants described differences in the methods for obtaining information on strengths-based practice. Among nine non social work participants, four obtained the knowledge of a strengths-based practice through training, and the other four learned about this practice through their job experiences. However, for social work professionals, four obtained information on strengths-based practice through their university education, and two participants obtained information through on-the-job experience. In total, about 38% of the participants obtained their knowledge of strengths-based practice through training, workshops, and conference participation.

The mean duration of work employment including youth development work for social work professionals (13.8 years) was similar to non social workers (13.1 years). Employment career years were compared by groups with 5 years intervals: under 5, 6-10, 11-15, 16-20, and 21-25. Three social workers were employed between 16-20 years, whereas three non social work participants were employed between 11-15 years. Among 18 participants, seven (38.9%) were employed between 6-10 years and four were employed between 11-15 years (22.2%). Among the 18 participants, seven participants had a bachelor's degree, and eleven had master's degrees. More master's degree holders were identified in the non social work group than social work participants (6 vs. 5).

Case Illustrations

Three case illustrations are provided in a narrative form to highlight the general nature of youth development practices as it relates to the strengths perspective. David's case is chosen because it describes the characteristics of positive youth development as a philosophy and a practice. He also provides the status of youth development as a profession and how it relates to social work as a discipline. Amy's case is selected because it represents a social worker's perceptions of youth development and the youth-professional relationship as she has worked at a nationally well-known youth mentoring organization for more than five years. Pam's case is provided because it highlights the meaning of the positive youth development as she applies it to her youth work practice.

While each narrative is distinctively unique, their accounts represent the discussion on youth development as a profession (David), perceptions of the relationship buildings for youth development work (Amy), and converging practice of youth development and the strengths perspective (Pam) that also underlined the other study participants' understandings and experiences of strengths-based practices. These three illustrations offer examples of differences between gender, race, and social workers or non social work participants since one narrative comes from a male, Asian American without social work education (David), another from a female, Caucasian social worker with eight years of youth development work (Amy), and the other from a female, Hispanic social worker with 18 years of social work practice (Pam).

Three case illustrations are provided in a narrative form in order to help readers become familiar with youth development practices. The findings then are presented according to the four research questions. The following narratives are edited but directly extracted from each participant's narratives.

David (non social worker, male, Asian American)

David has been working at an intermediary (associational) organization for positive youth development in a metropolitan area from 1994 to the present. His first experience with young people was working for a church programs and activities in 1989. Without any training, he engaged in ongoing youth activities, field trips, church youth programming, and community work. His first real training in youth work was in 1994. Most of his emphasis and background is community-based youth development work.

> Positive youth development to me is it's an ongoing process by which all young people seek to meet their basic needs and build competencies.… It means that number 1, we believe that young people are able to instruct and guide their own lives, and then number 2, that we work with them in such a way that acknowledges that they are able to do those things, and what we try and do is help them come to some determinations. But they are the principal actors in their own life. We take them seriously. We value where they come from, and we also allow them to make decisions. And then having those are all really kinds of parts of it, but for me the key ingredient is that it's the fact that young people themselves are seeking to meet their basic needs as opposed to adults having to force them into a decision.
>
> In the social service field it's seen as something you do until you can find something else, a better job. So that's one difficulty.… You have to understand that your role as a youth worker is to help facilitate youth development. You're a part of the process. You help guide young people. The difficulty sometimes is we see ourselves as the main actors in youth development. We are the ones that make it happen as opposed to young people being the ones, and I think we reverse that

relationship or that role, and so that gets to be a very difficult process. So youth work becomes about what the adult wants to do as opposed to what the young person wants to do.

I think social work is getting left behind in this endeavor. I think, as I see it, because of current funding trends, educational connections for youth workers are not happening in social work but they're happening in education. So what's happening is.… They're connected to schools of education instead of schools of social work. And some of that is driven by the fact that funding for youth work, because the current model for funding is after-school programs … And because they're in after-schools that money comes through the Department of Education, and because it comes through the Department of Education you're seeing that education is starting to comprise formal education in schools, informal education. So I think schools of social work need to decide pretty quickly, they need to start to have conversations with you, the workers, to say how do we create a context that's more friendly to you, because right now there isn't that context.

David's understanding and perceptions of the positive youth development is based on his direct youth work and running a youth work certificate course at a community college. He taught youth development classes. As he said, the youth development field is struggling to be a profession and is looking for a related academic discipline to create a youth development degree. Although there are some progresses in some fields, such as the education profession, he pointed out that the social work field needs to create more friendly context and take youth development seriously.

Amy (social worker, female, Caucasian)

Amy is a BSW social worker and a mentor for young people and a case manager for a mentoring youth development organization. In addition to her direct practice as a mentor, she matches up the mentorship in mentoring programs based on interviews with children and mentors, and then she provides the ongoing support to volunteers, the children, and their parents to make sure that their relationship is positive and productive. She was exposed to the concept of the strengths perspective and wrote academic papers about that perspective in college.

> There are so many different aspects of social work and so many different fields that you can go into. Just for me I felt very comfortable working with families, with youth, with children, and it's a role that I think I like a lot…. I felt that I did the most good working with the youth and their families.
>
> I really like the variety that's in my job. I meet so many kinds of people. And I meet them in their home, which I really like.… I like what our organization stands for. I think it's a real positive in the life of our children that we serve and I think that people are happy to see me in this kind of position that I'm in. It's not often in being a social worker that you're working with clients that are happy to see you.
>
> One example that I have is I matched up a Big Sister with a girl. She was about 12 or so and it was very unremarkable, their friendship. The Big Sister was very consistent and saw her Little Sister every week. Things went well. But then about a year into the relationship the Little Sister got removed from the home. The mom lost custody. She was very neglectful and she had a step-dad in the home that was not a good role model, and as a result that was why the children were removed, because she had this man living with her…. But the Big Sister continued to see the girl, just continued to see that she had somebody else in her life. She lived with an

> aunt for awhile and then she lived in foster care, and now she lives in a group home. And the Big Sister continued to see her. It's someone she can call. The Big Sister is just really there for her…. That's made an impact on her, knowing that not everybody is going to disappear, not everyone is going to give up on you.
>
> One time I was going to end my match because she's a teenager and she was not being responsible in the relationship, not being communicative. So it was tough…. and my relationship with my Little Sister is pretty atypical because of her personality and situations that she's faced and the decisions that she's made. My relationship is, I guess I'm a little bit more stepping back from that relationship. But I still continue it and I still try to be there for that family but I'm not as involved.

Although youth-serving organizations are dominantly staffed with non social workers, Amy stated social workers are very well suited to work with youth. As a trained social worker applying the strengths perspective to mentoring youth development programs, she perceived that the youth development field is growing and it is becoming its own separate focus. However, she said that people do not necessarily see positive youth development as something that requires professionalism or professional training.

Pam (social worker, female, Hispanic)

Pam, as a MSW social worker, has worked with children and their families for over 24 years. She wanted to originally be a probation and parole officer, and started working at a treatment facility for children with emotional issues and then she extended her work to teenagers and youth development work. She became an enthusiastic advocate for strengths-based practice after she studied the strengths perspective at a graduate school of social work and she learned positive youth development through training.

I found that teenagers, when I started to work with them, they're actually pretty smart for the most part. They want to have a say in what's going on. At some point they're going to be adults and they're going to be responsible for themselves, and so I wanted to have those things be acknowledged. And luckily, about the time I made this discovery I started to see some training and research around how can you help youth in a way that's meaningful to them? That's when my whole world started to get opened up about the strengths-based perspective, about how to work with kids in a way that they'll listen to you, how to talk to them so they'll listen to you, how to engage them. So I just continued my work and then went to graduate school … and studied the strengths-based perspective as well as, at that time I was working at an agency that worked with a training company.… And they train people who work with runaway and homeless youth. They did a training on positive youth development. I'd never heard of it referred to as positive youth development, but that's in fact what it was, and that's what they called it. I went through some training with them and it made a world of difference because I took it back to the agency I worked in, and then we started doing, just changing some things, and some things we couldn't change. But we tried to do some different programming that was more meaningful to the kids we were with.

And so my knowledge base is what I know about working with people and trying to help motivate them, helping them figure out their lives, because they're the experts in their lives. We want to find ways to help them figure out "what am I good at?" "What have I done well in the past?" "What am I going to do well in the future?" I like trying to bring that information and that support.

> Before I knew about strengths-based practice.… I think we felt we were the experts and that we did know and that we were supposed to be there.… to tell folks okay, “here’s what we see as your problem and here’s the solution. So here’s how we think you should fix yourself. We’re here to support you”…. So then it challenged us to think differently.… I remember a therapist telling us, “well, you know, you do know many things and you’ll continue to know many things, and one of the things that we’re asking you to do is find out what these young people know and what they really need to do because they may be more motivated to engage with us if they get a say in what’s going to happen. So it started out very hard core medical model and then it started to move someplace else. And it moved someplace else as I got more experience and more educational background because that paternal role of I am the all-knowing person, it wasn’t working.… So then I started to see some changes and I learned those skill sets.
>
> When I first heard about positive youth development.… I said this sounds a lot like strengths-based training. It sounds a lot like it. It’s not exactly alike, but there are elements between both of these theories or paradigms that are very similar and they go hand in hand. And that’s when I was told that positive youth development could have a great impact at the agency where I was working, because we were using heavy duty strengths-based practice.

As described above, Pam, as an experienced social worker in strengths-based practice, remembered her medical model based practice and then explained how she changed into strengths-based practice and applied this to her youth work practice. Her story gives insight as to

how the strengths perspective is applied to youth work toward positive youth development practice.

In the following sections, the research findings are presented according to the four research questions: (1) practice principles of positive youth development; (2) the youth-adult relationships; (3) the benefits and challenges of professional practice; and (4) recommendations for better strengths-based practices.

Descriptions of the Definitions and Practice Principles of Youth Development

This section analyzes youth professionals' description of the definition of strengths-based youth development practice and their guiding practice principles of positive youth development. Youth professionals' definitions and meaning of positive youth development and the strengths perspective and their perceptions of the similarities and differences between the two perspectives are provided toward an understanding of strengths-based youth development practice. Based on the definitions of strengths-based practice, a set of basic guiding practice principles that youth professionals apply in their work with young participants follow this section.

Definitions of Positive Youth Development and the Strengths Perspective

Participants were asked to explain their understanding of the definition of positive youth development and the strengths perspective as well as the meaning of strengths-based practice. Youth development was described in the following ways: a developmental growth process, a positive perspective with emphasis on strengths and assets, a programmatic framework for providing opportunities for skill development, and building relationship and providing resources for children and youth. The study participants also identified the strengths perspective as strengths-focused, client-driven, relationship and connectedness-centered, and solution-focused.

Youth development. Youth development professionals must be able to define youth development in order to practice, defend, and promote it. This section analyzes youth professional participants' definitions of youth development and understanding of its meaning.

First, seven participants defined youth development as a productive developmental process of growth. Youth development describes something young people do – the natural process of learning, growing, and changing. For example, Jim, a non social work youth professional at a youth mentoring organization, defined positive youth development as putting young people in a position "where they're best able to succeed" for themselves. He stressed that the outcomes would be their successes in their academic endeavors, stay out of trouble, get along well with their family and peer group, and learn how to make it in society. More specifically, Tom, a director of a youth development department at a faith-based youth-serving organization, defined four growth steps that they can observe and measure including academic, physical, spiritual, and social aspects of growth.

> We'll start our tutoring program for the kids that are most needy in the academic piece. In the physical, every night that kids are here we're doing something in the gym or something in the game room that's going to be active. But also we're also doing life skills on nutrition and drug and alcohol abuse and those kinds of things. In the spiritual, because we're a faith-based organization, we make scriptures and prayer part of everything that we do, and a challenge daily that they're here to develop that relationship with God.… And in the social piece, yes, we have lots of kids here and we build relationships. We do teamwork stuff when we're playing basketball and kickball. We talk about sharing and relational stuff as we're playing in the game room, but we also teach life skills on conflict resolution and positive

communication and some of those kinds of things that reestablish and grow social pieces there.

One social worker, Amy, understood positive youth development as a process of helping the youth develop and attain their potential through such activities as mentoring and "different resources and goals for the youth to help them succeed and be successful." As a social worker at a non-profit community organization, Bob described positive youth development as helping youth interact with their peers effectively and being involved in the community, and having social development. "They want to feel as though they are a part of wanting to be a family or a team or something."

Second, seven participants stated that youth development is a positive perspective with emphasis on the strengths and assets of children and youth. Youth development describes the philosophy of understanding young people characterized by a strength-based approach to the experience of childhood and adolescence. Youth development recognizes the strengths that young people have and helps them build on their assets. David explained the meaning of youth development in three ways: (1) people believe that young people are able to instruct and guide their own lives; (2) young people themselves are seeking to meet their basic needs as opposed to adults having to force them into a decision. They are the principal actors in their own life; (3) adults have to take into consideration that even young people who are considered at-risk have done a great job at surviving.

So if you have a 19 year old person who's dropped out of high school, that person would be termed at-risk. But what we have to start to look at is to say what are all the things that young person has done to be able to survive in the system. And those

are the strengths that a young person has and how can you take those survival strengths.

Mia, a non social work participant, emphasized that her agency uses asset development model. She states, “They don’t look at young people as problems or individuals that need to be fixed” but they accept young people as they are. According to Sarah, a social worker at an intermediary (associational) agency, positive youth development is “the building and growing and giving youth opportunities to build and grow those skills and assets instead of just looking at ones that they already have.” Another social worker, Linda found positive youth development as a fascinating term because it strikes her a lot as what the strengths approach is in terms of trying to engage youth in a positive manner and build on their strengths and look forward.

Third, youth development is understood as a programmatic framework for providing children and youth opportunity for skill development. Youth development is described as a way of working with young people that values their participation, contribution, and unique personal characteristics. According to this view, youth development is achieved through efforts to create activities and settings that provide a context that promotes a young person’s development. Positive youth development is done with youth and by youth.

Ten study participants including six youth workers (non-social workers) and four social workers, supported this definition and meaning of youth development. Harry, a director of a youth department at a community youth organization, stated that youth development is so broad because “you can have a soccer team or a debate team.” Both of those can turn into a youth development opportunity. Diane, a non social worker, stated that positive youth development is operating a program that is consistently looking at “how it’s serving youth and getting feedback from those youth.” According to her, the work area for runaway and homeless youth was the

field where she had seen positive youth development being implemented and more outwardly discussed. Jim stated mentoring programs are an inherent area of youth development. Their mentoring is not a prescriptive program and they seek to form developmental relationships with the youth and the adults. Rita who has been working at a youth development organization for nine years, described that her organization used to say that they were a youth-serving organization, However, they started to say “we’re a youth development organization, not a youth-serving organization” several years ago. They have re-done all of their program goals to be in line with a more youth development approach.

Among social work participants, Sarah emphasized opportunities to be involved in positive, meaningful activities whether that is an after school sport or music. Cora said that she teaches youth skills, and builds rapport by using what they are interested in. This understanding is supported by Amy and Pam. “It shows that children in our program are affected positively” and as a result, children are more successful in school or have higher self-esteem. “We tried to do some different programming that was more meaningful to the kids we were with.”

Fourth, six participants defined youth development in regard to relationship building and connectedness between youth and adult or youth professionals. Positive youth development also means providing resources for youth to help them develop in a good, successful way. For instance, Harry described that we needed caring adults that have a mission to help youth. For Mary, positive youth development means that a youth is given the tools that they need to make choices that are healthy for them.

Sarah pointed out relationship building as having an important meaning in the understanding of positive youth development practice. “I think it’s very important that they have caring adults in their life besides a family member, and I think that a lot of times these youth

providers may be the only person in their life that they feel like cares about them." Cora also supported this definition. "You're building a relationship so that you can help them grow in whatever way you want them to." Youth development is all about building relationships and role modeling for them. In addition, Bob stressed environment as a big playing part in youth development. As an example of environment, "sometimes that's not the case when you have a parent that is on drugs and not there for their child or has some sort of mental illness." Poverty and poor neighborhoods are also mentioned as main factors.

The strengths perspective. Study participants were asked to describe the meaning of the term, the strengths perspective and strengths-based practice. Most youth professionals identified the strengths perspective as a strengths-focused, client-driven, relationship-centered, and solution-focused perspective and practice.

First, twelve participants pointed out strengths and assets to explain strengths-based practice. Strengths mean what youth can contribute themselves to existing resources "that would make them successful." According to Harry, all youth have "at least one strength," but some of them do not know it. "Some of them think they are stupid because they have been told they were stupid." However, he emphasized that "our job is to say no, you're not stupid. You might be misguided. You might not have the resources, but no one is stupid." For Diane, strengths-based practice means doing a good assessment of finding out what youths' strengths and challenges. For the youth professionals, the challenge is "looking at what the strengths are" and how to build on those strengths and how to get the parents to recognize the strengths since "parents get into a pattern of looking at their child in a certain way." It is about getting the youth workers to start reinforcing good things of the youth so that they can build from that.

Strengths-based practice is also understood as an approach where "you're not there to fix their problems, but to help youth to understand interdependency." It means that when "you look at clients you look at them" from the "assets and strengths" that they have versus "problems or challenges." Mia further stated the meaning of strengths-based practice as follow:

> For example, if a young person would come and a parent would say well, my young person is running away from home. And they've come with a challenge. The strengths-based approach allows me to look at what's right with the young person. What does the young person like to do in their spare time? Do they enjoy working with technology? That's a strength that they have. And how can we pay close attention to those positive things that they have within them, whether it's they're good at math, they like to read, they're good at talking to other people. Let's focus on those things versus focusing on their negative behaviors.

Tom also understood that strengths is the idea of taking a look at the strengths of a person's life, what is successful for them, what is working for them, and transferring that skill, strength, and success into areas that are weak or failing. Mary, a non social work participant employed at a mentoring program, said that strengths means "being able," and having self-awareness. "It's knowing yourself enough to know what you want and what you don't want and being strong enough then to live your life in a way that reflects that." Sarah, a social worker, identified the strengths perspective as a way of practice with clients. And it is a way of focusing on the strengths that the client already has. It is a different way of looking at the client and building assets. It is the opposite of the deficit model. Another social work participant, Cora, described that the strengths perspective would be looking at the students' strengths, what they are good at and interested in, and what kind of academics they like.

For Amy, strengths-based practice means that "when you're meeting someone or when you're evaluating a client or a family situation or whatever it is, that you first take into account all the positive things that that person has from where they're starting off." The best part of the strengths-based practice is to have people realize that they have "a toolbox of their strengths" that they can use in different situations. According to Kati, a social worker at a community-based agency, strengths-based practice is understood as an honest, supportive, and respectful asset model, not a deficit model.

> It's kind of like the nightly news. If all you see is negativity, if all they talk about is they go to the shootings, they go to the murders, the rapes, we get the notion that there's no good going on in the community. And I think that the thing that the strengths-based does is similar to that. Just the opposite. We are focusing on those things that have helped you thrive, those things that have helped you to survive, using your gifts and talents to move forward in your life. Not coming at it with every poor decision you've made or everything you did wrong or what you don't have.

"Strength" is also defined as an entity or area of one's life that is going well. Bob stated the meaning of the strengths perspective is "recognizing a client's strengths," helping them come up with alternatives and ideas to address their needs at the present time instead of just focusing on their weaknesses or the presenting problems. You're helping them recognize "what has worked for them in the past, what's working for them in the present, and helping them possibly pursue other strengths."

Second, among eighteen participants of the study, five social workers identified "being client-driven" as an important aspect of strengths-based practice. The strengths perspective looks at the client as the expert in his or her own life and it is not the professionals who think that they

know everything as an expert. “I am not the expert. They are.” Pam said, “I want to put them kind of in what we call the driver’s seat.” She understood the medical model as like “there’s a problem and there’s a solution.” Remembering when she was in a psychiatric setting in her work history, which was very medical model based, she stated that she would tell clients “okay, here’s what we see as your problem and here’s the solution.” However, she remembered a time that she was told to apply a strengths-based practice as follows:

> I remember I had one therapist who usually supervised my work and she said Pam, there’s a life and death situation and your client’s got to learn how to survive once you guys are out of there.… Unless it’s going to be a crummy decision where they will hurt themselves or they hurt other people or they would lose money or something like that. Let them try to make the decisions and help them figure out how to arrive at that decision. You’re going to be the person they’re asking…. How do you get there? That they’re going to be making decisions. And learning if they don’t make the right decision, they’ll learn from that. And you can help them, coach them, on what could work better next time.

The strengths perspective is seen as a great partnership between the client and the worker. “It’s just all of those things that good social work should be.” But it has always been there but people have not used that throughout time. It is a good way to move forward and help people to accomplish what it is they are setting out to do. According to Kati, “That’s just nothing but a win-win, not only for the client.… and the worker who’s going to be there for me every step of the way.” Bob also recalled his practice before applying the strengths perspective in his work, as he focused on the client’s needs and problem and tried to solve it. In retrospect, he tried to solve the client’s problems without allowing them to have some input as to what they saw the problem

as being. However, he realized that it was better in the long run if he allowed the client to tell him what has worked in the past.

The beauty of the strengths perspective is that it takes the burden off of the case manager or the treatment provider, or social worker, for feeling like they have to have all the answers. “It really says we may know some stuff, but they are the expert in their life and we want to support them in what their goals are.” As Linda states, “The way it was being done in child welfare” was “we’re the experts.” They do not have to be dependent on an organization or a social worker. According to Linda, the strengths perspective says, “We may know some stuff, but you’re really the expert in your life, and we just want to be there to support you and maybe help you make some of the connections you may not be aware exist in the community.”

Third, five participants including three social worker and two professionals with non social work education emphasized relationship building and connectedness as the meaning of a strengths-based practice. A positive approach seems to be a much more natural relationship. “I kind of think of it as when you have a friend. Don’t you want to be with a friend that’s positive, who believes in you, as opposed to someone who’s always putting you down?” For Mary, in order to build strengths, the relationship is the most important part.

It is much easier to build relationships with young people when we apply the strengths perspective. If we are looking at things that they do well “you can build a relationship with them” and they will want to talk about those things since nobody wants to talk about bad things. A strengths-based practice helps people to make connections for themselves so that at some point they can move forward in their life. According to Linda, one thing that really fascinated her is the whole idea, not just social work in general, “that a person doesn’t exist in a vacuum.” They

exist within a family, within a network of a community. They also try to look at ways to connect those folks with communities because we all need help from time to time.

Fourth, a strengths-based practice is understood as a solution-focused approach by two participants. For example, Tom states, “I’ve always seen strengths-based as solution-focused. Here’s the solution for this problem, let’s apply that same principle to this problem,” and “I think we feel like we are building those things from the ground up where some of these kids have not had a lot of opportunities to succeed. But we create the opportunities to succeed.” Bob also considers the strengths and makes it more part of the solution process. “Another thing that I do now that I was not doing when I immediately entered social work, was asking the client what they wanted to work on.”

Finally, three social worker participants stated that a strengths-based practice, in particular, the strengths perspective is related to the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare. One participant is a graduate from the University of Kansas, but two other social workers are graduates from other universities. **“**I just knew that was KU’s philosophy” (Cora), “mostly from coming out of KU that’s what everybody talks about” (Linda), “I identified it as really a brand that KU’s using to promote itself” (Tim). According to Linda, The United Way took upon themselves to look at what was the best way of working with the homeless population in terms of case management, and they enlisted KU at that time to talk about the strengths-based practice.

Similarities and differences of Youth Development and the Strengths Perspective

As already stated in the earlier chapters of the study, review of literature suggests that positive youth development is inherently strengths-based and closely interrelated to the strengths perspective. The positive youth development approach is applied to work with youth in a variety of settings and the strengths perspective has been applied to the field of social work and youth

development. Based on the development and application of positive youth development and the strengths perspective, several commonalities and differences between these two perspectives were identified as presented in the literature reviews section of the study. In order to better understand the nature of the development and application of the two perspectives to the social work field and youth development practice, study participants were asked to identify the commonalities and differences between positive youth development and the strengths perspective.

Practice application of the two perspectives. All eighteen participants clearly stated that they are implementing strengths-based practice and explained the application of the youth development principles and the strengths perspective in the related fields of children and youth work. Youth professionals' practices include the strengths perspective as well as positive youth development. For example, according to one participant, positive youth development is "a strengths-based practice.… It encompasses more than just the strengths perspective." The strengths perspective is used in positive youth development as a starting place in working for young people's development. Mia stated that the strengths perspective is developed from the social work profession but it is now mixed in the youth development field. According to Amy, "So I think you could definitely employ the strengths perspective in positive youth development."

The strengths perspective is also applied for youth development at school settings. Cora, a school social worker, stated that she always tried to start their meetings with talking about the good aspects of the child. It gets them to think positively and then "they'll be able to move on to okay, here's what we're going to talk about." She added that "now that I've been doing that and

experiencing it I will take it with me to wherever I go. If I take another job that'll just be part of what I do."

Positive youth development is understood as a subset of the strengths perspective. Pam described "some subsets of that might be like a positive youth development" because "it draws from many of these elements" Kati said that she applies the strengths perspective in her every day work. According to her, "Letting the clients decide what it is that they want to do." By offering this strengths-based approach, "People are going to be much more willing to tell you what their real deal is, and not what they think you want to hear."

Similarities of the two perspectives. Many participants identified similarities between youth development practice and the strengths perspective. Nine respondents pointed out that both practices are looking for strengths that clients already have. Eight mentioned that both approaches build upon the positive traits of the clients and move forward from it. Four participants used the phrase "they are the expert" which means the decision-making is handed to consumers in both the strengths perspective and positive youth development.

First, nine participants stated that the strengths perspective and positive youth development recognize that young people come with strengths that they already have. As David states, "They don't need to be fixed. They're not just bundles of deficits but they already have their strengths." Sarah described that both are looking at assets and talents that youth have and going from there, instead of looking at something from a problem focus. Thus in terms of practice, youth professionals need to identify those strengths before working with young people in any meaningful ways. Both approaches also look for strengths that the youth do to live and survive (Diane and Mia). Both practices are working on problem solving from success-focused practice goals (Tom). This understanding is also supported by four social workers. For instance, Amy

talked about the tools that the youth already have and the tools are going to help them work toward their goals and achieve their potential. Another social worker, Pam remembered when she first encountered the term positive youth development through a training program. “It’s not exactly alike, but there are elements between both of these theories or paradigms that are very similar and they go hand in hand.”

Second, eight participants described that the commonalities between youth development and the strengths perspective are the positive traits that individuals might have and build upon those to be successful. According to Doug, “from a youth development approach I see it as the same kind of things. I think there’s very common things that research has shown that need to be, that are core pieces within youth.” A social worker, Sarah, also stated that it is a positive way of building and growing and being an advocate for and with young client instead of the deficit model, which focuses on problems. To another social worker, Bob, strengths-based practice is developed out of some positive resources. “You’re looking at positive influences on a young person’s life, whether it be professionals or parents or someone who is a positive influence. It could be school, it could be church activity, so it could be any kind.”

The positive youth development is also similar to the strengths perspective in that professionals are trying to engage youth in a positive manner. Linda, another social worker, thought that the youth development approach was very similar to the strengths perspective. “I think it’s very similar. That’s why I said I really had trouble trying, I mean they call it something else, but it felt to me like it was the strengths approach.”

Third, four participants stated that both practices recognize that young people have to be intricately involved in solving their own problems and moving forward in making decision on their own behalf. As Sarah states, “It changes the paradigm to say that the social service agency

or the youth worker is going to solve things for them, to say that they will make their own decisions on how they want to move forward." Pam described the elements of similarity between the strengths perspective and positive youth development in five parts. First, both of these perspectives are "putting the client in that they're the expert." Second, both perspectives indicate that "the consumers have input and they have a say into what's going to go on and what they're going to participate in." Third, both perspectives help us refrain from fixing people. "We are not going to rescue them at all." Fourth, in both perspectives youth will learn to make choices and "they'll increase their decision-making skills." Fifth, the decision-making is handed to consumers in both perspectives. "It's about letting them make some decisions even if it's a crummy decision."

Table 4

Similarities between Youth Development and the Strengths Perspective

	Non Social Worker Views	Social Worker Views
Looking for strengths	Youth already have strengths (Y1) Look for strengths (Y3) Strengths-based practice (Y4, Y5) Success-focused goals (Y6)	Tools that youth already have (S3) Looking at assets, talents (S1) Strengths-based (S4, S9)
Positive traits/ Resources	Positive traits that youth have (Y2, Y8, Y9)	Positive way (S1, S5) Looking at positive resources (S7) Engage youth in a positive manner (S2, S8)
They are the expert	Making decision on their own (Y1, Y7)	Let youth make decisions (S4, S6) Youth as expert (S4)

Table 4 shows a summary of the identified similarities between youth development and the strengths perspective by social workers and non social workers. Social workers and non social workers similarly pointed out strengths (four social workers and five non social workers) and decision-making (two social workers and two non social workers). However, more social

workers emphasize the similarities of both perspectives' positive traits than non social workers. Sarah, Cora, Kati, Bob, and Linda among social work participants mentioned positive traits as a similarity of both perspectives, while David and Rita stated positive traits among non social work participants. In general, perceptions on the similarities between both perspectives reveal no differences between social workers and non social workers except for social workers' more emphasis on the positive traits.

Differences between the two perspectives. Fourteen participants described the differences between the strengths perspective and youth development work. First, four participants mentioned that the positive youth development practice is specialized to young population, whereas the strengths perspective is applied to various populations. As Pam mentioned, positive youth development "seems more specialized to young people and the strengths perspective could work with anybody." The strengths perspective can work with a broader population. Bob states, "I think strengths-based practice is a more broad theory. You can work with various populations in that model."

Second, three participants pointed out that positive youth development is more likely to consider resources and environmental contexts than the strengths perspective does. For example, Kati stated that positive youth development is looking at the big picture and trying to look at the various aspects of intervention for children and youth. According to Linda, the differences are that "we are looking at the child within the context of their environment and their family."

Third, four participants stated that youth development practice focuses on giving youth opportunities to build and grow skills and assets instead of just looking at the strengths that they already have. One social worker described that the strengths-based approach often just looks at the strengths that someone already has. However positive youth development is "kind of growing

the youth." According to Amy, the word development implies "kind of past growth and into the future," whereas the strengths perspective implies more of "where you are now and what you can do with what you have now" to achieve your goals later.

Fourth, according to two participants, the differences of the two perspectives are related to the nature that the positive youth development emphasizes community development and resilience factors of the youth. From a community development perspective, one participant states, "What we have to do is work with them in such a way that they understand what the resources are, what some of the weaknesses are, what the areas of improvement are." Youth professionals have to give the youth information, guide them, and nudge them. From a resilience factor, David acknowledged the resilience factor of at-risk youth. He stated that resilience factor is more pertinent to youth development and we can use "resilience factors to help young people understand better how to take those areas of resilience and translate it to other parts of their lives so that they can be successful holistically."

Fifth, two participants mentioned that the strengths perspective becomes specific when used assessment tools. One youth work participant shared examples of using the assessment process within her agency. Once the intake and assessment was done with the youth, then the information was transferred over to the case manager. Tom also said that he was using a strengths-based assessment. "I'd have a very casual conversation for 30 minutes and set some goals. I could name all three goals for this person because I'd had this conversation and kept track of what they're doing."

Table 5 summarizes youth professionals' perceptions of the differences between youth development and the strengths perspective. Although all participants did not emphasize the differences of both perspectives, it shows that more social workers (eight) pointed out

differences than non social workers (six). Social workers stated that both perspectives are differentiated by population, resources and environment, and main focus, whereas non social work participants understand the differences based on community and the resilience factor of youth development and assessment factor of the strengths perspective.

Table 5

Differences between Youth Development and the Strengths Perspective

	Youth Development	Strengths Perspective
Population	Youth specific (Y2, S4, S7, S9)	Various / broader population (Y2, S4, S7, S9)
Resources & environment	Looking at big picture and various aspects of intervention (S5, S8)	Youth within context of their environment and their family (S5, S8)
Main focus	Giving youth opportunities to build skills and growing the youth (Y2, S1, S2) Past growth and into the future (S3)	Looking at strengths that someone already has (Y2, S1, S2) What can do with what you have to achieve goals (S3)
Community & resilience	Community development and resilience factors (Y1, Y9)	
Assessment tool		Becomes specific when using assessment tool (Y3, Y6, Y8)

In summary, the similarities of the youth development approach and the strengths perspective were explained in three themes: looking for strengths, having positive traits, and recognizing that "youth are the expert." The differences of the two perspectives were also identified. Youth development is related to the youth specific population, environmental contexts, building skills and assets, and community development and resilience factors, whereas the strengths perspective becomes specific when using an assessment tool and is applied to broader population.

Guiding Practice Principles of Strengths-based Practice

In order to understand the nature of positive youth development practice from the youth professionals' perspectives, participants were asked to provide their guiding practice principles. The analysis revealed that the practice principles were organized around six primary principles. This includes strengths and resources, working relationships, youth participation, self-awareness, safety, and others including faith, mission, and non judgmental attitude.

Strengths, skills, and resources. Since this study is implemented to understand the nature of strengths-based youth development practice, it is expected that the terms "strengths" and "resources" will often be described by participants. Although these terms are not used extensively in the statements of the interviews, many participants stressed several terms related to strengths and resources with regard to their guiding practice principles.

First, six participants described a belief in youth with a focus on the strengths and positive aspects as a guiding principle for their practice. For example, David, a youth professional who worked for youth development organizations for more than 10 years, mentioned a belief in the young person as the first principle. He stated that youth work is believing that young people have worth, value, and dignity, and helping inform that experience in them. "So you have to believe in young people, ultimately believe in the work of young people." One social worker, Pam said, "Focusing on their interests and their strengths and their talents works much better than focusing on their deficits and their pathology and their shortcomings." Mia, a non social work participant, also supports this principle. Her basic guiding practice principle is to help youth in reaching their goals and not confine them with limitations. "It's for the possibilities with them and the opportunities that exist." Kati, another social work participant, explained that sometimes the power that people have within themselves to do things goes far beyond what people would

expect them to be able to do. Her guiding practice principle involves, “starting where the client is at and not where I think they should be.”

Second, five participants mentioned education and skill development. One non social work participant at a non-profit community center described education as one of the most important principle of his practice because “it’s very difficult to be successful without an education.” A social work professional with more than 23 years of experience in social service field emphasized “best outcome.” David described the importance of knowledge and skills that are necessary for youth to be competent and successful as his guiding principle. According to him, in order to get that knowledge and skills, “we have to make sure young people’s basic needs are met and then competencies.” With similar principles, Tom said “it would be something about meeting needs. Doing my best to discover what this child needs most and do what I can to meet it.”

Third, three study participants view family as an important resource for strengths-based youth development. Family is everything, according to a youth worker, Harry. His first principle for children and youth is “Don’t do anything that’s going to embarrass your family. And anything can embarrass the family. You get pregnant, you’re embarrassing your family. You go to jail, you’re embarrassing your family. You join a gang, you’re embarrassing your family.” Diane, another youth worker, added her personal principles with emphasis on the importance of families. “Even though it may be a bad family, that’s still that’s youth’s family. That’s their family forever.”

> You needed to understand that you might disagree with what’s going on in the family (but that) doesn’t mean that they don’t deserve to still receive services. And I had a lot of staff that struggled with that. Especially, not so much with older

> teenagers, but very young children who'd been abused in the home would come in for services and the staff would say man, I really can't sit down and talk with that parent because I'm so mad at them and what they did. And it's like you know, it's not for us to make a judgment. Yes, we understand that this is a bad situation, but we need to come from it from a professional standpoint.… You couldn't get mad at the parent even though the parent had made a really bad decision or had done something really bad.

Working Relationships. Many study participants emphasized that a good working relationship is a primary principle for their strengths-based practices. First of all, love and respect are viewed as important to the working relationship by six youth professionals including three social worker and three non-social workers. Tom mentioned showing love and appreciation as one of his guiding practice principles.

> As far as my guiding principles it's got to be unconditional love first and foremost, which means that I love the child but disagree with his behavior, and have to communicate the difference. Joey, I love you, but your behavior was out of bounds tonight. And he knew by the time we left that I loved him because I didn't yell at him, I wasn't even angry. I was more shocked and hurt by what I saw…. It was just love and just unconditional love. So first and foremost, for me it's to love the child, to value the child, to show love and appreciation.

One participant stated that "relationship's key, but that relationship has to be based on the worth of the young person. Diane mentioned "treat youth and families respectfully" while she introduced several practice principles of her agency in doing youth work. For example, when youth came into the service, staff needed to explain why they were there and what that meant to

the family and help them understand that “staff were there to help, and how staff could help.” Three social workers (Sarah, Amy, and Tim) stated that their guiding principles are mutual respect or respect for the inherent worth and dignity of each person. One social worker stated, “Another thing that I try to remember or try to keep in mind is kind of their truth that they believe and I begin with what they say and even if I don’t think it’s true I think about the reasons that they’re saying those things.”

Second, active listening ranked as another important principle of youth development practice. Four participants, including one non social work participant (Mary) and three social workers (Pam, Kati, and Tim), stated listening to young clients as one of their guiding principles. Pam, who worked for young people for more than 10 years at a social service setting as a social worker, said that her first practice principle is “to be there to listen to them and find out from the young person what they are interested in.” She pointed out that it is important for youth professionals to know the fact that all workers are on a learning curve. It is possible that professionals might think that they know all the answers to the questions that youth asked. “You’ll probably learn more from them than they may even learn from you. So use that to help you in your career and youth practice.” Kati stated, “another big thing, we’re there to teach but we’re also there to learn from our clients. To me that’s a critical guiding resource.” Youth workers need to be available for questions and information when youth want information, “they want it right then. In addition, they have had a lifetime of adults who disappointed them.”

Third, establishing professional boundaries is another guiding principle of youth development practice in relation to working relationship categories. Three participants illustrated the importance of the principle in working with youth and with families. One participant introduced an example of a monthly staff meeting. “We would talk about if there were any issues

that had to go round philosophy or principles or personal boundaries. We would talk about that and use that as a teaching or a learning moment in that staff meeting." Pam**,** a social worker, also emphasized establishing boundaries as a guiding principle. According to her, "It is a relationship when you have a client or a consumer." That relationship is used to build that client's level of confidence and self-efficacy.

Participation. Five youth professionals, including three non social work professionals (Jim, Mai, and Doug) and two social workers (Bob and Tim), described participation including engagement and empowerment as a guiding practice principle. Youth professionals view participation as an important purpose of their work. One participant states, "Because of that purpose we want to engage them, the youth, as much as possible within what we're doing. I think this goes to the strengths perspective and how you draw from what the youth has within themselves to move them forward so they might be able to learn something from it." According to Tim, "There's a period of engagement in which I get to know them and they get to know me, and then we discover that we want to work together, that they want to work toward something and I can help them."

A social worker, Bob, said that getting a client to the next step is to help them empower themselves. "When they have the motivation and the desire to want to be better, it's helping them realize that that is possible. And that everybody has a dream and a person that has dropped out of high school can eventually finish college." According to him, "Simply just because you dropped out doesn't mean that some day, if that's what you want, a college degree, that you can't get it." Mia, a youth worker at a governmental youth agency, described her principle as "making youth feel like they matter." This includes making them feel like they are participated, engaged and they are empowered. "They're empowered to do something. It's not just a caring, loving

environment, but it's somewhere where we're doing something, we're getting things better. We feel good about the outcomes."

Self-awareness. According to four participants, while education, experience, and length of time in the field each contribute to professional development, the key feature of self awareness is central to a youth professional's effectiveness for the purpose of employing best practices in their interactions with youth. If youth professionals are open to learning and possess the ability to recognize their own feelings then self-awareness is more likely to be acquired.

According to Doug, one of his guiding principles was self-understanding and self-awareness. "If a youth is having problems and I don't have self-awareness about myself and what my triggers are, it might be easy for me to engage in an area that I shouldn't be engaging in." He went on to say,

> If you're working with a kid, and prior to working with youth, you know that when somebody steps on your shoes that triggers something in you every time. It triggers a negative emotion in you, and you know if you're working with a kid in a conflict and he steps on your shoes, you've got to have self-awareness enough to know okay.

Harry also said one of his guiding principles is to "be the person that you are because that's who you are." Pam, a social worker, mentioned "you should know yourself and staff." People who go into this line of work hopefully have done some work on themselves. "If we don't know who we are and we don't have some guiding principles and guiding philosophy in what we bring to that relationship, then the relationship may not end up being a good one." Thus as described by Kati, it is important "to be able to be creative in helping people to solve their issues or to help them move forward with wherever they wish to go in their lives."

Safety. Four youth professionals (Diane, Jim, Mai, and Rita) described the importance of safety principle. For Diane, it is safety of the youth, safety of the family, and safety of the person working with the youth. Jim said that their mentoring organization's first obligation is the safety of the child. In a statement of Mia, "They feel like they're in a safe environment." For Rita, it is about emotional safety and physical safety. In particular, "she always wants them to feel like they're in a place where they're safe emotionally." Her emphasis on emotional safety is different because "people mess up emotional safety a lot and don't listen and pay enough attention." She went on to say, "I don't think you can have outcomes, you can't have positive outcomes unless your kids have emotional safety."

> For emotional safety to be there for kids today you have to be very, very intentional about it. You have to be very present in a group, especially a new group, because there's a lot of vying for position and bullying kind of stuff that is pretty prevalent in the kids' world. So it comes with them to our program.

Faith, mission and being non judgmental. Among other principles, faith, mission, and non-judgmental attitude need to be mentioned. One social worker, Cathy emphasized faith as a guiding principle. It is what gives her the compassion and the drive to go on. It makes her excited and energetic about what she does. According to her, "People are able to experience my faith by talking to me because my faith is so much a part of who I am." A non social work participant, Rita stressed mission of the organization as the first guiding practice principle. The mission of her organization is positive youth development.

Also, three participants including one youth worker (David) and two social workers (Kati and Cathy) stated non judgmental attitude as one of their guiding practice principles. "It's just giving them the opportunity to say whatever they want to say without judgment. According to

Cathy, “You might make suggestions to help them make better decisions, but don’t judge them. We were all young. We all made mistakes. And it’s just easier if someone will talk to you about that mistake instead of judging you for it.”

Table 6

Comparison of Practice Principles

	Non Social Worker Views	Social Worker Views
1. Strengths& Resources		
Belief in youth and strengths	Believing that youth have worth, value, and dignity (Y1) Help youth in reaching their goals (Y5)	Starting where the client is (S5) Focusing on interests, strengths, and talents (S4)
Education and skill Development	Emphasis on education (Y2) Knowledge and skills (Y1) Doing best to meet needs (Y6)	Best outcome (S3)
Importance of family	Think of family first (Y2, Y3)	
2. Working Relationships		
Love, respect, and trust	Showing appreciation (Y6) Treat respectfully (Y3)	Mutual respect and trust (S1,S3, S9)
Active listening	Listening to youth (Y8)	Be there to listen (S4, S5, S9)
Professional boundaries	Professional boundaries (Y3)	Establishing boundaries (S4)
3. Youth participation	Engagement (Y4, Y9) Making youth feel like they are empowered (Y5)	Engagement (S9) Getting youth to the next step (S7)
4. Self-awareness	Self understanding (Y2, Y9,)	Know yourself and staff (S4) To be able to be creative (S5)
5. Safety	Safety of youth, family, staff (Y3, Y4, Y5) Emotional safety (Y7)	
6. Faith	Faith (Y6)	Faith (S6)
Mission	Mission of organization (Y7)	
Non judgmental	Being non judgmental (Y1)	Without judgment (S5, S6)

Table 6 summarizes the guiding practice principles of youth professional participants. It also shows the comparison of participants’ practice principles by social workers and non social

work participants based on the descriptions written above. Each group tends to apply similar guiding principles to their practices. In particular, each group commonly states principles of a belief in youth strengths, working relationships, participation, self-awareness, and faith and non-judgmental approach.

However, there are significant differences between social workers and non social work participants around several guiding principles. More social workers emphasize active listening and a non-judgmental approach than non social workers. More youth professionals with non social work education stressed principles related to education and skill development, importance of family, youth participation, safety, and mission of organization than social work participants. The cause might be that social workers apply the strengths perspective, while non social work participants work on youth programs from positive youth development principles. Although both perspectives are strengths-based, the strengths perspective is more applied in the relationship with children and youth when they need help or they are in crisis, while youth development practice applies in more broad young population for their optimal development as a whole.

Professionals' Understandings of Youth-Adult Relationship

This section presents youth professionals' understandings of the effective youth-adult relationships. The topic of youth-adult relationships inherently involves discussion of youth professional roles, the relationships that develop between youth and adult professionals as a function of these roles, and professional boundary issues as it relates to relationship building of the practices. Within the following sections, the research findings are discussed with regard to the three major categories determined through the research analysis: roles, relationships, and professional boundaries.

While each category is distinct, there are overlapping and complimentary elements between the three categories. As discussed in the literature review, the critical role that youth professionals play in the lives of children and youth is difficult to overestimate. At the core of youth development work between youth and adult professionals is relationship building which, in turn, has direct implications regarding matters of professional ethics and boundaries.

Understanding the Roles of Professionals

The youth development field is distinguished by a mixture of formal and informal roles and duties of youth professionals. Study participants were asked to discuss their expectations of the roles of youth professionals in their youth work programs. All eighteen participants described several roles of youth professionals in youth development practice. These include opportunity giver, active listener, relationship and skill developer, friend-like mentor, a role model, being a resource person, and being a advocate for the youth.

First, five participants understood youth professionals role as giving youth opportunities "to talk," "to make decisions," and "to do well." According to Harry, a youth worker is more than a teacher but less than a parent. "Anything in between there, that's what a youth worker can do." Youth professionals need to focus on the youth and their experiences. Pam emphasized that she was willing to be of support but allow youth to make decisions. "I am going to engage them, I'm going to approach them, I'm going to be respectful of them, I'm going to teach them." Youth workers give youth the tools to help them make it themselves. These tools include laws, respect, and opportunities to make the right choice.

Second, seven participants mentioned listening and learning as an important role of youth professionals. It is giving youth the opportunity to say "whatever they want to say without judgment." Among social work participants, Sarah emphasized talking and having real

conversations with youth. “You don’t ignore them. You talk to them like a normal person instead of like a project or like a kid who doesn’t know anything.” Amy, case manager at a youth mentoring organization, also wanted to keep in mind taking what children say as they say it when she conducts interviews. She tries to be very sensitive to their situation. Kati also supported this view by saying “Before you rush to judge and rush to conclude you need to be a good assessor of what’s going on, and you need to do a lot of listening.”

Third, being a supportive developer for youth to fill their lives with relationship, skills, and faith was addressed by ten participants. Youth professionals need to identify “what’s missing in their lives and start to fill their lives with what’s missing.” Youth professionals provide certain skills whether they get them or not. As Harry states, “You’re helping him develop and there’s no test for it, where a teacher has to test this child of what things he learns. A youth worker doesn’t have that concern.” Mia said that youth professionals need to look at themselves as individuals who are with youth to encourage, motivate, coach, and help the young person “get from point A to point B in their lives.” Rita described the role of youth workers to be a developer as one of the successful aspects of youth development programs. “They have to be having some kind of positive change or learning something or getting better at something that’s important to them” Doug added direct skills, negotiation skills, multitask skills, and activity developing skills that continue to engage youth as roles of youth professionals. According to Kati, a social worker, “Our job to do is to help build people’s spirits up, again, in a genuine fashion. To encourage people sometimes with the little steps that they’ve taken, because it is only in the little steps that it will lead to bigger changes.”

Fourth, according to ten participants, a youth professional’s role is to be “more of a mentor” and at the same time be “consistent and polite friend” to youth. For example, the

mentoring program only works when there is a positive friendship that develops between the youth and adult. Jim, working at a mentoring organization, expects youth professionals to be giving of their time and of their interests to young people. According to Mary, the priority of the mentor is to be a friend. “It’s not to be a tutor. It’s not to be a teacher. It’s to be a friend.” Amy also stressed a friend-like mentor type of youth professional. “I try to make the interview interesting. I try to, especially if they’re younger, try to play up my tone a little bit to try to make it more interesting, or even if they’re older I try to change the wording a little bit so I seem more on their level.”

Fifth, eight participants emphasized being a role model for the role of youth professionals in the youth development practice. As described in the study participants’ narratives, all young people need caring adults to be positive role models for the young people. In other words, youth professionals need to be somebody who can be respected by youth. Based on his own experiences, Harry, a non social work participant, stressed that the desire to be a role model comes, “at least in the sense that while the kids are here they’re going to see me as someone who cares about them and someone who is doing; I’m not only preaching to them that they need to be good, but I’m also showing them that I’m good, too.” A social worker, Cora, also said that she is with youth to be a role model on how to behave “out in the world.”

> When you’re working with children or you’re around them, they’re always watching adults. They’re always watching you, what you’re doing. Okay, if it’s okay for him to do that, then maybe I can do that. So you’re always a role model. And kids just soak that up. They really just respond to that.

Bob pointed out that a lot of youth do not have an adult role model to provide or give them access to needed community resources and spiritual or extracurricular activities. Tim also stated

that young people need a caring adult who is going to allow them to make mistakes but also provide a good role model. It is also stated that "boys need a positive male role model." Amy added, "anybody can benefit from" mentoring relationships "because it's so good just to have another positive person in their life" that cares about them.

Sixth, six participants emphasized "being a resource" as one of the roles of youth professionals. The role of youth professionals is to help navigate children and youth and to reinforce positive resources. According to a social work participant, the role is to help youth recognize what is a resource to them because "knowledge of the resources is half the battle." The role of a youth worker is also said to help facilitate youth development and thus the adult workers are a part of the process. One participant with non social work education gave an example of a youth worker at one of her camp programs. "She's their mom, she's their sister, she's everything to a camper, because she makes everything work for that group. It's her job to help those girls through their entire camp experience." Another example was presented by a social worker.

> I work with a lot of families that don't speak English. I speak Spanish, and so sometimes I end up helping people with, I had somebody call me with a legal question the other day. I see myself as being kind of a resource to the family because they might not have other organizations that they have contact with. So I try in that way.

Seventh, seven participants stressed advocacy and supportiveness as one of the important roles of youth professionals. According to Jim, "they feel alone and they don't feel like there's anybody there for them. By providing a service you can heal that a little bit and help them become successful adults." Doug stated similarly, "We call our youth workers youth advocates

because that's really what they are. And I see them taking a strong connection between the youth and the parents." Among social work participants, Amy stated, "I feel like part of my role is also being a support for the family." Kati emphasized "being a great advocate" as a critical role of youth professionals. "Being able to help them find their own voice." Bob emphasized a supportive role of youth professionals as follow:

> My decision to do that was to keep them possibly away from drugs and alcohol within their immediate neighborhood, and so I thought it was good that he wanted to be a part of this youth program at church. His friend stayed across town and his friend couldn't provide transportation to get him to church and back. He wanted to do the same thing so for a while there I was taking him to church. So I was being a support for this activity that he wanted to be involved in.

Perceptions of Effective Youth-Adult Relationship

As mentioned earlier, relationships are at the core of youth development work. It is through the interpersonal relationships between youth and adult professionals that youth can learn, change, and grow. Thus, youth professionals' understandings of the effective youth-adult relationship are explored and several themes of the importance of the relationships and attributes of effective youth-adult relationship emerged through the data analysis. Study participants were asked to identify what they believe an effective youth-adult relationship should look like. In the responses of youth professionals, the relationships are stated to be essential for a meaningful and positive influence upon the youth with whom they work.

Importance of youth-adult relationship. Seventeen study participants acknowledged the importance of effective relationships between the youth they serve in the programs and youth professionals. In the absence of appropriate adult relationships, youth are left to their own life

circumstances. For instance, among non social work participants, David emphasized that "having a good enough relationship" with young people is key to healthy youth development. According to Harry, "the less good people in a kid's life the more they're going to seek out other people that are not their family."

Social work participants also emphasized the importance of relationship building in the strengths-based youth development practice. As Sarah described, "the thing that's important with all of our clients, but maybe particularly so with youth is building relationships with them." It is important that young people have caring adults in their life besides family members. Another social worker, Cora, described that "you're building a relationship so that you can help them grow in whatever way you want them to." According to Pam, the program that she works in now is a research-based practice that emphasizes staff relationships with their young clients.

As described above, the importance of the youth-adult relationship in the youth development practice is supported by the study participants. In fact, youth professionals invest considerable time and attention to the development of effective relationships with young people. In the viewpoints of the study participants, these relationships are essential to maintain their expected professional roles and responsibilities.

Despite the importance and professionals' efforts of relationship building, youth professionals are faced with the challenges of providing a model of appropriate, effective relationships for the youth so they feel safe and supported in their development through adolescence. Several themes of honesty, mutual respect, trust, having a shared relationship, active listening, being supportive, keeping professional boundaries, and genuineness emerged as being attributes of an effective youth-adult relationship.

Attributes of effective youth-adult relationship. First, eleven participants described honesty, mutuality, and trust as important attributes of an effective relationship building. Key among these relationships was the expression "it's a win-win situation" for the youth and the adults where both parties value and respect the other person's opinions, beliefs, and ideas. Diane said that "being honest, respectful with each other and asking the youth to be honest with the worker" are important for effective relationship building. Mia stated that she feels that both parties are able to "come to consensus on what's to be done with the project." Among social workers, five participants emphasized mutual respect, honesty, and treating each other with respect. For example, Amy responded as follow:

> Some of the common factors that make that relationship more productive is definitely there has to be communication, like 2-sided communication. You have to be open to actually calling the adult that they work with or just being able to talk to them on some level. You don't have to say everything, but you have to have some communication, 2-sided, and take some responsibility in that relationship and make sure that it continues. Communication is just like a really, really big part of that relationship, and respect is important, mutual respect.

There has to be open communication, honesty, and availability for an effective youth-adult relationship. Participants also emphasized a trusting relationship as an overarching theme of a strengths-based practice. For example, Cathy mentioned trust as "one of the other things there has to be" for relationship building. According to her, "kids have to trust you to tell you their deepest and darkest secret and know that it will stay with you." Bob supported a mentoring type relationship with trust, because "an effective approach would be an approach where they can feel that they can trust your input, they can respect your input. You are a mentor. I think that

accomplishes the whole professional-client relationship as it works for youth." As for the mentoring type of relationship, Mary stated the importance of a mentoring relationship as follow:

> We want to give them a sense that there are people in the community who care about them and that they can succeed. We want to open up new worlds. We want them to see other cultures. We want them to see other opportunities in career, in life. We want them to know that there's somebody there supporting them when peers are pressuring then to do things that they don't want to do. They have somebody who will stand by them. And you know, not just parents or teachers, but somebody who's not getting paid, somebody who's just walking in that door to see them and to take care of them. We want this to be a true friendship.

Second, four participants identified a shared relationship as an effective youth-adult relationship. One respondent believed an effective youth-professional relationship needs to have a sharing and shifting of power. It is a relationship in which adults are not the ones who dominate the conversation or those who make all the decisions. In that relationship sometimes the young people lead the way and make decisions, and sometimes adults lead the way and make decisions, but "it's a very much shared relationship." The youth professional is not dependent on the young person and the young person is not dependent on the youth worker.

Pam also pointed out the effectiveness of a balanced relationship. She emphasized "an even playing field," and the balance of power. There should be some sense of fairness, a sense of equity and "give and take." Linda responded, "I think too often adults get in the position of feeling like they have to parent you and often that sets up a naturally resistant relationship where youth feel like they're being pushed into some type of action."

Third, six participants described active listening as another integral quality of effective relationship. David stated the importance of "being available to listen and hearing what they have to say without always offering feedback." Harry also pointed out listening as an important aspect for a good positive relationship, "even when we don't want to listen, because a lot of times kids just talk and talk about nonsense." One social worker said as follow:

> It can be as simple as the youth might be telling me about his or her favorite band and I'm not familiar with them, so oh, tell me more about that. What kind of music is it? I think there are lots of opportunities to let a youth teach us instead of pretending that I know everything and I'm here to teach you. So I think that's what really important about the relationship, is giving them opportunity for that.

Fourth, eight participants described "being supportive" as an effective youth-adult relationship. According to David, being supportive means understanding where there are gaps in the young person's development and filling that space so that young people can see that "as people we have to develop comprehensively, holistically, and it's possible." For Tom, being supportive is about having "a listening ear, a sympathetic ear, an empathetic ear." He stated that if he does not have an authentic desire to be with children and youth, and "if it comes across as forced," then that is not real and it cannot be effective in relationship. According to Harry, a good positive relationship is "being there for someone, helping them get out of situations that they couldn't get out by themselves, and then following through with them," and also making sure that "once you get them out of that situation that they enter something more positive." He went on to say, "But the most important is to just continue to keep tabs on them or follow up on them to see how they're doing. And then along the road is providing resources if they need them." Mary is also supportive of youth by encouraging them and trying to find out what they

may be struggling with and then trying to help them feel better about that. Thus she believed that seeing in the child positive changes is important for an effective relationship.

Fifth, five participants stressed professional boundaries as significant for the effective youth-adult relationship building. There needs to be some professional boundaries that people want to be in order to develop an effective youth-adult relationship. Diane used the phrase "youth worker can be friendly but not friends. That's a real difference."

> Friends share personal information, they share their personal phone numbers, they text each other. That is not something that you would do with the youth that you serve. And sometimes for younger youth workers, those right out of college, it's very hard for them, especially if you've got a 22 or a 23 year old serving an 18 year old or a 17 year old. There's not a lot of age difference there and sometimes it's hard for them to forget I'm the adult and I'm a role model.

Another youth worker believed the importance of keeping professional boundaries for an effective youth-adult relationship. "This is the same as a friend versus a professional, professional versus a friend. There's some very strong roles that they each take boundaries. Some sense of professionalism is huge." Cora, a social worker, also emphasized "having boundaries" between youth and adult professionals. Another social worker, Linda, pointed out the importance of "helping to enhance and point out strengths, yet keeping good professional boundaries in terms of I'm not your parent."

Sixth, four participants described genuineness as an integral quality of effective relationship building. One participant used the word "transparent" to explain an effective youth-adult relationship. He enters into a relationship with a child not because it is his job to do, but it is what he wants to. He said that he loves kids and likes being around them and wants to get to

know them. “Maybe that’s genuine or authentic.” In order to establish an effective relationship between youth and adult professionals, some social work participants also believed in the importance of genuineness. According to a social worker, “It has to be the real deal. It has to be not contrived because people know when you really don’t care and they know when you really do. I think that is a central piece that must be in place.” Cora said that she tries to be sincere and “That’s kind of along the lines of caring.” Amy added similar understanding of an effective youth-adult relationship. She said that there has to be some responsibility in the relationship and make sure that it continues.

Table 7

Comparison of Effective Youth-Adult Relationships

	Non Social Worker	Social Worker
Honesty, Mutuality, Trust	Being honest, respectful (Y3) A win-win situation (Y5)	Mutual respect (S1, S2, S4, S9) 2-sided communication (S3) Trust relationship (S4, S6, S7) Mentoring relationship (S8)
Balanced and Shared	Shifting of power (Y1)	Balanced relationship (S4) Shared relationship (S8)
Active listening and learning	Available to listen (Y1, Y2)	Listening instead of telling (S1)
Being Supportive	Being supportive (Y1, Y2, Y8) Having an empathetic ear (Y6)	
Professional boundaries	Friendly but not friend (Y3) Have some boundaries (Y9)	Having boundaries (S2, S8)
Genuineness	Transparent (Y6)	Be genuine (S5), Be sincere (S2), Being responsible (S3)

Table 7 compares the perceptions of effective youth-adult professional relationships between social workers and non social work participants. While each group identified several

common attributes of effective youth-adult relationships, each group has significant differences around four attributes. First, more social workers described honesty and respect based mutuality as an attribute of relationships between youth and adult professionals than non social work participants. Seven out of nine social workers emphasize mutual respect and trusted relationship compared to two non social workers. Second, active listening is more stated as an attribute of youth-adult relationship among non social work participants. Third, more non social work participants also state supportive relationship as an important attribute of youth-adult relationship. Forth, more social workers addressed sincerity, genuineness, and responsible relationship building than non social workers (three vs. one).

Professional Boundaries

As stated earlier, the positive relationships that are formed between youth and adult professionals may well contribute to healthy development of young people, yet, as with all relationships, there are occasions or periods of certain challenge and tension. The importance of establishing professional boundaries was emphasized as a primary attribute of effective youth-adult relationship building. Within this context, guidelines for appropriate ethical behaviors and proper professional boundaries have been variously developed in order to ensure the protection of the youth-adult professional relationship.

Related to the effective relationship between youth and adult professionals, study participants were asked to answer the meaning of the professional boundaries and important ethical issues regarding professional boundaries with young people. What follows is a description of major themes including youth professionals' perceptions of the importance of professional boundaries, definition and meaning, and examples of ethical issues.

Importance of professional boundaries. Ten participants mentioned the importance of professional boundaries in their statements. As youth are very vulnerable, if there are no professional boundaries, "anything goes and when anything goes, that causes chaos." It is also important for the youth worker to be professional in working with youth and "not exploit the situation that they're in." Professional boundaries are important to protect the young people and the professional as well. As Rita stated, "kids want to know everything" about their youth workers and thus youth professionals need to be trained enough to know "what is okay to share with kids about their lives."

Professional boundaries are critical for youth professionals to be able to provide a healthy role model. This is important because inappropriate relationships contaminate professionalism in youth work. Bob, a social worker, stated that "we have to be careful as to what we say and how we say it to children and youth because of their maturity." "Things that you tell them are more influential," and "you run into legal issues and breaking the laws." Linda emphasized the necessity of setting clear boundaries in the beginning of the practice when youth workers overstep professional boundaries in the practice, this damages the ability to do professional work with young people.

Definition and Meaning of professional boundaries. Professional boundaries are defined as societal boundaries that "have to do with how close we can be with a young person." Harry stated, "It is good to have relationships with youth and their families, but just be careful how far you go into that family." Diane understood that maintaining professional boundaries means "not taking advantage of the situation that you're in." For Jim, professional boundary means "knowing the workers' role that the adults can not be a parent or relative to the child." Mia described "I wouldn't interact with young people the same way that I would interact with my

young people at home." Professional boundaries are also understood as ethical guidelines. "There are things that are appropriate and things that aren't appropriate." For Mary, professional boundary means "not to transport a student anywhere, not to take that relationship off-site in any way." Another youth professional, Doug stated:

> Boundaries. It means that there are lines in my mind and very specific roles that each of us have.… One, that the professional is not going to take advantage of the youth and the youth's not going to take advantage of the professional. It's very clear and then there's no blurriness in the relationship between the two.

Among social work participants, Sarah understood a professional boundaries as a very fine line. "You can't cross that line into being their buddy, because you are the professional." Cora said that she is not at school with youth to show affection. She is there to show them how the child interacts with adults. Pam described professional boundaries as "weighing the balance of being the staff and allowing the youth to explore their world." To another social worker, the key to professional boundaries is always to understand that "you are in a helping relationship role as the practitioner, and to hold that relationship sacred and to never abuse that relationship." According to Bob, professional boundaries mean establishing some sort of parameters in relationship with the clients. There are parameters in coworkers and supervisor-worker relationships. There are The Code of Ethics of social work and "You have to meet those. You have to abide in those ethics in practice." For another participant, a professional boundary is understood as "not developing personal relationship with clients." There are also ethical issues, "You should never take advantage of a client's dependence or weakness for your own gain."

Ethical issues. Although a general notion of boundaries was familiar to study participants, many youth professionals mentioned that professional boundaries and ethical codes govern their

practice concerning bounded relationships with youth. Youth professionals shared agreement that particular ethical boundaries must be resolutely upheld, including both youth and worker confidentiality, self-revelation, and professional comportment toward youth.

First, five participants mentioned confidentiality as an example of an ethical issue. Tom said that in counseling, "they do their best to maintain privacy and confidentiality" so that the relationship stays intact and the trust is built and support is established. According to Mary, "they have to break that confidentiality if they tell us something that means they are in danger or suspect abuse." Thus, she discussed how hard it is to balance or break that confidentiality, but ethically "we must do both." Two social workers (Cora and Amy) also considered confidentiality as an important ethical issue because her job involves several people to work around one kid.

> Yeah, because you've got all these people working around one kid, so you have to be careful what's okay to disclose. If the child tells you something, is that something that I need to tell the teacher or should I hold that back. There's a lot of issues, because I heard it from the teacher's side, but if I knew that about that child then I may have done something differently or it would have just made me think differently. So that's a big ethical dilemma.

Second, six participants addressed the issue of touching. David said, **"**it's probably not a good idea to hug young people. Even though you can do it in really healthy ways." Mia said that youth professionals need to say to the youth that "this is inappropriate behavior" when boundaries are crossed. "For example, if a young person comes up and gives you a kiss on the cheek." She said that not addressing touch is unethical. Cora stated "That's a struggle, because some kids, especially the younger ones, want to hug their teachers." So to keep the boundary, social workers shake hands or high five at school, but that is how they show that they like each

other. David spoke of the importance of creating appropriate touching. As an example, he extends his hand as fist and young people give him a fist back.

> A rule of thumb that I give youth workers all the time is if you're a male never be caught alone with a person of the opposite gender where someone can't see you. That's just calling for problems. So it shouldn't be one on one kinds of things. And I think there are times when a female young person will come to you and say I need to talk. Well, when you go talk you need to make sure you position yourself in a place that you can be seen. You have some privacy so she can share but you can be seen so that it can't be misinterpreted. And I think that there will always be that situation where young people develop crushes on you, but as long as the youth worker understands his or her role and that you're there to help guide the person, then as you become aware of that then you can also find real appropriate ways to correct the relationship so that it doesn't become mishandled.

In relation to the touching issue, Tom stated, "never be alone with a child. We push that so that the child can't accuse you of something because you've got witnesses." According to Mary, it is also stated that youth professionals are not supposed to go to children's house and visit with their parents and try to interrupt in their personal lives. In particular, according to Diane, since she understood that every youth that comes to her agency has been possibly at some point abused or neglected, in order to keep professional boundaries, she suggested that "you need to be very cognizant of your body posture and your tone and the kinds of things that you do around them, because you don't know the kinds of situations that they've been in that could trigger that abuse or feeling that they have been abused in the past."

Third, four participants stated professional boundaries with families of children and youth. Jim stated that there is a case where the boundary was obviously not in place well enough. To keep the boundary, all contact needs to be professional contact, and not out of work contact between that case manager and a family. “Personal contact and social contact should be limited.” For example, mentors need to know that they are there to deliver a service and support the family, but mentors need to know when the family needs more than they can give. Jim stated “it’s okay to maybe involve yourself a little bit, things like going to the arcade, taking someone to a movie, that kind of thing, that’s kind of expected a little bit.” However, he also emphasized that “you need to know that a parent asking you to buy food or provide money for bills or to buy school clothes and that sort of thing, that’s beyond the scope of what you’re supposed to do.”

Linda, a social worker, also described that there are a lot of ethical issues involving youth in terms of boundaries with families and information sharing. Information sharing with a family member without crossing that boundary that the youth has set can be difficult because sometimes “we feel like it might bring the relationship along farther and help make a stronger connection.” Harry also pointed out a caution when working with children and families. “You need to maintain your distance far enough to say I’m helping your child as much as I can and this is as far as I can go.” Jim also stated similar ethical caution. “Making sure you try to treat every family the same and don’t play favorites.”

Fourth, two non social work participant (Harry and Mary) and three social workers (Sarah, Cora, and Pam) emphasized self-revelation as an important ethical issue. Harry mentioned not talking to youth about workers’ personal life “no matter how good a friend you think you are with them.” According to Sarah, disclosure is sometimes appropriate if it relates to what the client is going through and if it helps move him or her forward. “And it does help build that

rapport." But she does not want to tell her personal life just to tell stories. Also, Cora does not share personal things about her life unless she feels like it is appropriate to a situation or if she senses from the child. She might tell them a little bit about what she did over the weekend to give them another perspective about what adults do when they are not at work. According to Mary, they have specific parts of training that are designed to teach their staff about what "it's okay to share with their kids about their lives."

Fifth, two non social work participants (Harry and Mary) stated that ethically they are bound to report things that they do not want to report on. Harry shared an example of reporting a dilemma. "We knew of a young girl who was being abused by her stepfather and she came and told one of us and she said please, please don't tell nobody. We said I'm sorry, but we have to tell somebody. We had to report it to the police."

Sixth, two participants (Diane and Linda) described religious work as ethical issues. Diane shared an example of a fuzzy boundary of a very religious worker talking about the bible or Jesus with youth at work. Youth workers could not proselytize at work even though youth initiated the conversation, she had to draw him aside and point back to agency policies and remind him of his inappropriate actions. Linda stated,

> I don't want to push my God on someone else, and so I think that's an area that social workers are often afraid of, because they don't know how to connect with people on that level unless, now if I have someone who, for instance, talks to me about God, then I feel comfortable talking to them about God. But I think some of that is our society and all of the political stuff that happens around, for instance, the 10 Commandments being in the Supreme Court or praying in school or what have you. There's just so much drama about it in the media that makes it difficult for

social workers or anyone in the caring field who feels like they could be in a position of liability to approach that subject sometimes. And maybe wrongfully so.

Seventh, Rita indicated that her organization made a new policy that none of their staff are allowed to contact any of their young participants in the program in any way that's electronic. They can only write them letters. Because as soon as the youth have their email address they have their Facebook page, and as soon as they have their Facebook page they have everything, "like what they are doing Saturday night, what their favorite band is, and then also all of their friends are on their Facebook page," and her organization members do not want their youth to see the college-age life of their staff.

Eighth, Kati stated a case when people try to give gifts as one of examples. Where it gets muddy or where the boundary can get blurred is "when we are talking about a large material assistance cost." Any monetary gifts from clients are not acceptable. She said that "we're not in a profession where we would use and abuse people in any kind of way for our own personal gain. Whether that's monetarily, sexually, anything along those lines would be an ethical violation of that helping relationship."

> So that one is always a little bit tricky. Obviously, if it's something that has, something that they've created, something that they've done themselves, an art work, a school photo. In working with youth, those to me are acceptable. That would be probably devastating to not accept somebody's art work.

Ninth, Pam addressed intimate relationship issues as an important ethical issue. "If practitioners start to see themselves having these very deep feelings for somebody," they need to step back and get with their level of supervision. According to her, "If you start to buy your client things because you feel sorry for them and you give them money or.… I'm going to go

buy them dinner and I'm going to buy them a new jacket for the winter. That can be a real difficult thing."

Tenth, three participants addressed the difficulties that the relationship can become too intense between youth and adult professionals. Then "the young person becomes dependent on you as being their surrogate parent, and we don't take the place of parents." On the contrary, Linda said, "Unfortunately a lot of youth have experienced times where the professional working with them has become like a second mom or a second dad and has gotten too emotionally invested in the youth to the point that they get angry when the youth doesn't do what they expect of them." And so it is a really hard and "it's a fence that we lock. You really have to be careful." Pam, another social worker, stated that there are boundary issues when adult professionals start to espouse their belief system and what they think youth should do.

Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of Youth Development Practice

This section provides youth professionals' perceptions of the benefits of a strengths-based youth development approach for youth and youth professionals. This section also identifies supportive factors and challenges for successful youth development practices. A description of agency context that support or impede the implementation of the strengths-based practices is presented as well.

Benefits of Strengths-based Practice

The study participants were asked to name the benefits that young clients and youth professionals may derive from a strengths-based youth development practice. Study participants pointed out the benefits that they see young people gain from engaging in youth development practice. This includes empowerment, being a positive contributor, having more successes and better outcomes, increasing self-determination, and relationship facilitation. Many respondents

also indicated that youth professionals experienced the benefits of learning, providing better environment and getting program direction in their practice.

Benefits to youth. First, eight participants recognized the empowering benefit of the youth development practice. Strengths-based practice takes children and youth seriously as people. It does not view young people as just immature; but it recognizes that "they are first and foremost people." Recognizing that youth are constantly being told what to do, Diane described that youth development practice helps youth feel like they are being asked for their opinion. It helps youth figure out options other than the path that they have been on and how they can make better decisions. "A part of that positive youth development is allowing the youth to make decisions and that they're the ones that are in control of their lives." Mia stated that youth build self-esteem and their confidence with youth development practice.

Strengths-based practice is beneficial to the youth because they are told "what they're good at or what they're capable of" rather than "what they are bad at." They are asked "what do you want, and you can do that." Therefore, strengths-based practice empowers young people. They can feel good about themselves. Amy, a social worker and a case manager at a mentoring youth organization also explained the empowering benefit of the strengths-based practice as follows:

> Sometimes youth, I guess teenagers, maybe especially, kind of think about situations in a more negative light.... So I think that you kind of approach them with some strengths ideas.… look at all of the good things that you have.… I think that it can be more empowering. And as a result, help them in a lot more ways.

According to Cathy, one of the benefits of a strengths-based practice is "giving feeling of richness and blessedness." Youth professionals can give youth hopes that they have done something and made a difference in their life, and that is a blessing for them. Pam perceived the

benefits of the strengths-based practices as youth being empowered, and feelings of happiness and self-sufficiency. Young people feel empowered to live their life in a way that is healthy for them and helpful to them.

Second, six participants answered that youth development practice is beneficial to youth because it focuses on the positive rather than only looking for all their problems. “When you label kids by their challenges you make them all about their weaknesses. If they’re a child who has trouble in school, if you introduce them like that, then all that does is it cements their mind, this image that they have that they’re a failure.” However, on the contrary, Jim states, “if you present them this way, that these kids are good,” then “they begin to see themselves as having something positive to contribute.” Strengths-based practice can “instill that value into the kids,” and they can fill in the holes in their development towards being self-sufficient, economically independent, and contributing members of society.

Third, six participants including three social workers described the benefits of strengths-based practice to children and youth as having more success and better outcomes. For example, Tom expressed that strengths practice is supposed to take young people “from point A to point B,” thus they look different as they proceed. Rita perceived that strengths-based practice sets youth up for more success in the future. “It is going to grow youth and make them a better quality of life.” Bob said that strengths-based practice is more beneficial because the client feels more a part of the program or plan. He explained that “when they feel a part of something,” which will give the individual to have a better outcome for them. For Cathy, strengths-based practice is a good way to move forward and help people to accomplish what “they are setting out to do.” Strengths-based practice focuses on “those things that have helped people thrive and survive” using gifts and talents to move forward in their life.

Fourth, five participants explained aspects of self-determination as a benefit of a strengths-based practice. One youth professional recognized that the young people have the ability and right to act on their own benefit. “It’s that first step towards true development. It says no one else knows better what you need than you, and so you should be the one who’s acting in this rather than assuming that someone else would know more.” Cora, a social worker, stated that strengths-based positive practices help to build self-esteem for the child so that they can feel good and positive that they can make their own decisions. Another social worker, Pam described that they know that “they are in the driver’s seat.” According to her, young people are in command of their life, they make decisions, and they have skill sets to know how to make the decisions. “If you’re practicing it in the way that it’s meant to be practiced, your clients know how to do these things and they will go out and they will know the triggers and when things aren’t going well for them they’ll be able to identify the triggers.”

Fifth, a strengths-based practice was identified as facilitating the relationship between youth and youth professionals. For example, Sarah states, “I’m the only one who’s asking them what they want and encouraging them, then they’re going to like being around me and they’re going to look to me that oh, yeah, she’s all right. So I think that’s really going to facilitate that relationship.” A social worker participant also mentioned that strengths-based practice makes the young client learn how to make connections. As an example of a youth development practice, mentoring program can give a friend to young participants. Mary said that “if they had no friends, they have a friend. And if they had a lot of friends, they have one more friend.” According to Amy, a social worker, “any child can benefit because it’s so good just to have another positive person in their life that cares about what can happen to them, cares about their outcome in life.”

Benefits to youth professionals. First, eight participants described that strengths-based practices provide a better environment and satisfaction for workers to get a positive response from young people. Strengths-based approach helps workers to be in a more proactive environment and in particular, it helps with the burnout issue. One participant stated that "being in a positive mind-set alone will help workers in their work environment and the work culture." Mia states, "that isn't riddled with stress and anxiety and concern, but one that is very opportunistic." According to Doug, if taking a strengths-based perspective, outcomes tend to be better than taking a deficits-based approach. Although he did not pretend to draw any kind of philanthropic joy out of it, Jim felt happiness and satisfaction with the strengths-based practice as he worked for a mentoring program.

According to Sarah, it is great because it is looking at the positive. "If all you do is look at the negative and try to figure out what somebody's problem is and how I can fix it, it puts it all on me." It puts the burden on the youth worker. However, by applying a strengths-based practice, she states, "I get to point out what they're good at. I get to point out what they're doing right." Kati stated that the strengths-based practice is just the opposite to the nightly news which has a lot of negativity. As Bob described, strengths-based practice is less threatening to the client and more helpful to establish a better relationship with clients. "It's also more productive because it seems to make the process and treatment expedient. It's a better creative approach to working with the client."

Second, five participants stated that youth professionals can learn a lot about themselves from strengths-based practice. For example, Diane stated that strengths-based practices give youth professionals a time to think about "why you are in it" and if they get to the point where they can not handle the stress, then "you need to make a decision on whether you need to stay or

not." Another participant, Rita described that she gets to live in a world that has more people that have learned that "they are trying to teach." To Amy, a social worker, the best part of the strengths-based practice is to have people realize that "they have a toolbox of their strengths and resources" that they can use in different situations. A youth professional can remind young people of strengths and resources that they already have. Thus young people become less dependent on the youth professional for whatever they need.

> As a professional, approach your client situations using the strengths perspective, I think that the task that you have as a professional helper with whatever situation, is less daunting, because you can approach it thinking okay, they have this issue but they have this person they can call on and they have this good skill and they have these different things.

Third, four participants described that strengths-based practice gives youth professionals purpose and direction of their practice. Pam said that it made her highly marketable so she has been able to "land a job a lot easier." It helped her know how to hire the best and right staff, because she can lay out before they come to look for the job whether "they're social workers or they fall in that group of other helping professionals." According to Bob, strengths-based practice can work with a broader population including a client with a multiplicity of problems. "If you were a social worker or a therapist that practices cognitive behavioral it may not work well with all population." Tim pointed out that it is very important to include client strengths in the practice. "If you don't include them you'll be missing a large part of the picture and you won't be able to develop realistic goals and objectives."

Supporting Factors and Challenges

Youth professionals identified youth-centered mindset, faith and spirituality, youth participation, characteristics of programs, and having a supportive mentor as significant supporting factors. On the contrary, limited resources, youth program characteristics that are whimsical, getting people to buy into youth development, multiplicity of client factors were described as challenging factors. Adultism, youth worker's attitude, and general criticism on the strengths perspective were pointed out as well in relation to barriers or hindrance of the strengths-based practice.

Supporting factors. Study participants were asked to describe factors that support their ability to implement a strengths-based approach in their youth development practice. First, seven participants including five youth professionals with no social work education (Harry, Jim, Mia, Tom, and Doug) and two social workers (Sarah and Amy) identified that youth-centered perspective that reflects strengths-based approach support youth professionals' ability to implement youth development practice. For example, Jim stated that "understanding youth and being empathetic to their situation" and remembering "what it is to be a kid" would be important factors to support his ability to implement youth development work. Harry responded that he understands the young Latino population because he has been in exactly the same place where the youth are living and he already has been through similar situations to what the youth are going through.

Study participants also emphasized a mindset that reflects a positive youth development (Tom) and a very broad perspective or mentality about philosophy of treatment (Doug) as supportive factors. Amy mentioned her own mindset as a supportive factor for her mentoring youth organization. "Sometimes you might have a challenge that day and it affects your ability to think positively about things." She has to remind herself and think in a more positive mindset in

order to apply the strengths perspective. Sarah stressed personality factor. “Some people are negative and they just always think of the bad.” And they are not going to be effective at strengths-based practice.

Second, seven youth professionals including four social worker participants (Cathy, Bob, Linda, and Tim) and three professionals with no social work education (David, Tom, and Mary) mentioned their faith, religion, and spirituality as supporting factors for the implementation of youth development practice. For example, David told of his experiences with young people in the church. He did the spiritual programming for the church and community development work connecting the church. “In churches that can afford it, they pay their youth workers well, but they understand what a youth worker is.” As a youth worker at a faith-based organization, Tom mentioned a spirituality-related statement several times during the interview. Spiritual development is one of the top four missions of the organization with physical development, social development, and academic development. For him, spirituality is understood as a personal relationship with the creator and it brings hope and peace. Spirituality removes guilt and shame when it is done appropriately. He said, “I am called and that is what drives me, what makes me tick, is that it’s my job to love kids the way God loves kids.”

Mary, as a program director for a mentoring program, emphasized faith for the youth development practice. “Often you won’t know that you made a difference. You can’t see it. You can’t see that a kid is getting healthier.” She stressed that “you have to have faith, and so it’s almost a faith thing.” Cathy said her work is a calling, and not just work. “I’m Catholic. I know in my heart and my soul. This is what He wants me to do, because if not, I wouldn’t have a passion for it like I do.” She emphasized her faith as a supporting factor for her work. Bob also described an example of providing children a ride to church activities. He suggested that youth

workers may go to church with youth who want to go to get involved in an activity. According to him, “church, the identity of spirituality, a relationship with God, all the activities that youth development, that different churches have, gives a child an alternative.” Defining spirituality as one’s personal relationship with God or a higher being, Linda pointed out that people use religion or spirituality when they have a problem or something is wrong in their life rather than it being an integral part of their being. Tim also mentioned that his inspiration for wanting to work with poor and oppressed people comes from the Catholic tradition. “That’s how I really came to it, through my religious faith more than anything.”

Third, in order to support a strengths-based practice, youth professionals have to work in an organization that support the philosophy of youth participation. Four participants emphasized youth participation as a supporting factor. For instance, David emphasized young people’s ownership in decision making. “Fostering true youth participation is a skill that not everybody has.” He added that youth workers have to be willing to subvert their opinions sometimes to the direction and the decisions the young people want to make. He also stated, “You have colleagues who come from a deficit model or who believe that adults in the lives of young people are to be everything, and that becomes a frustrating situation.” According to him, “They very much want to control what young people do and what they say.”

A social worker, Pam illustrated an example of youth participation that she experienced at a youth development program at her youth-serving organization.

> We knew there was youth out there that we were not reaching. So we did some research. We went and visited other programs and decided to start a street outreach program.… and so then the next step we did was starting to figure out how are we going to figure out what’s going on? Because we’re not teenagers. So we did some

> studies with the youth.… And it was interesting because we didn't know what we were doing. The kids told us. And of course we had to feed them and we had to give some incentives for them to talk to us, because we're adults and they don't trust adults. So we did our focus groups.… And then the next step.… we had a couple of youth volunteer from our training organization and we tried to get money to have them be actually co-workers, but they were helping us with doing things like getting charts set up and copying and filing, and they would come and tell us what's really hip for the kids to do and not hip. They would tell us what the most "in" words were and basically what things we could expect with youth. So that was a great thing. That was taking some aspects of positive youth development and incorporating them into what we were doing, only at the time we didn't know that's what it was about. We just kind of followed our heart.

Fourth, three participants identified the characteristics of a youth program as significant for the implementation of strengths-based practice. Mary pointed out the biggest factor supporting her strengths-based practice as having their program to be school-based. "Having it embedded in the schools so that the schools own it because people feel so much more connected when they know that everybody they are dealing with is actually part of that school." Another participant at a youth mentoring organization, Jim, mentioned the matching issue of mentoring relationship as a supportive factor. He said that their impact that the mentoring program can have on youth is defined by the longevity and consistency of the mentorship. According to him, a match that stays together for more than a year and meets every week is going to have positive outcomes. Cora described that "being part of a multidisciplinary team" at program was supportive for her to apply the strengths perspective in the practice because the team members have got all different

perspectives of people for the children. She introduced that they always try to start their meetings with talking about the good things of the child. She said that “if I take another job that’ll just be part of what I do.”

Fifth, two participants identified having supportive mentors as a factor for their strengths-based practice. Rita said that she has had a couple of strong mentors that taught her a lot of things about how to do the job well. They are still in her life so she can call them if she has questions. Doug also said that youth professionals need somebody that can help pull them out, “I think that something that kind of fosters and supports is having somebody that you can connect with on a regular basis that you can consult with” because on a day-to-day “you’re stuck in the muckety muck of doing your job.”

Challenging factors. Study participants were asked to describe the aspects that hinder them from implementing a strengths-based approach to practice. First, eight participants pointed out limited resources as obstacles for the implementation of youth development practice. In fact, although the philosophy of positive youth development is important, to a front line youth worker, “there’s nowhere they can go to find that.’ According to David, “many of them do work on instinct.”

Tom demonstrated physical limitations in the building and program including transportation problem as challenges of their implementation of an after school program. More specifically, Rita stated three challenges of her job: the money, the staff, and the facilities. Cora addressed limited resources within and outside of the school. Another social worker described, “having to have a longstanding resource for funding. Having some of the resources that we need. Having resources to have things like drop-in centers, informal gatherings for our clients, training

for them, having resources so they can go get the classes that they need, the prenatal classes that they need."

Second, seven respondents pointed out characteristics of programs and their environment as challenges to the implementation of youth development practice. For example, as stated by David, youth programs are "whimsical in nature." He explained "that's the context by which we do our work. They're not programmed. So you have an after-school. You still have to do youth development there" According to him, it is like every few years we have new names for programs and new adjectives. "So we use the adjectives but we never define the meat of the program." Tom also mentioned that he misses dinner with his family four days a week. He stated a felt expectation to have more program participants than space capacity. When they feel the pressure to have larger numbers of program participants, then the amount of chaos goes up and the amount of relationship goes down. As Doug stated, the biggest challenge to the implementation of a strengths-based practice is having an environment that "doesn't go to support that." According to him, "there are going to be day-to-day challenges" that hinder us from taking a strengths-based practice. So if the environment does not foster strengths-based practice, it would be very easy to get into a deficit perspective.

A social worker, Amy described program characteristics as the aspects that hinder her from implementing a strengths-based approach. Since she is working for a youth mentoring organization, customer-focused services and marketing that she is not familiar with and not trained in are hindering parts to her. She stated that "we can't approach certain situations from a strengths perspective. But sometimes it's not always possible because we're serving our volunteers a lot of times. Because they are giving their time"

> I guess one of the barriers is just the structure of our program and the limitations of our program, in that I don't have a lot of communication with the volunteers and families and children, and so if there were to be an issue or something like that, one of the barriers is my limited contact with them, so I might not be able to have a really good rapport with them to address certain issues, whatever might be going on.

Third, seven participants pointed out the challenge of getting young people and adult volunteers to buy into youth work's beliefs and youth development programs. For instance Harry stated that they developed a great model for working with youth and if they implemented that model, "it was going to get a lot of kids off the street and back in school." However, the challenge is "getting people to see the vision that you have and that you're able to then do it." Jim said that recruiting enough volunteers has become a challenge because "guys sometimes are a little hesitant to embrace the idea of spending time with a child." Mia also stated the recruitment of young people for the program and having enough youth to be a part of the programs as barriers to practice youth development work. Mary described getting people to volunteers as the biggest aspect that hindered her from implementing a mentoring approach. "They have to hit them so many times with the information before they really sit up and take notice" because "they're getting bans constantly." One social worker also mentioned people's perception about how to help people as a barrier of the practice.

> And I think what frustrates me too is just an understanding of who are social workers and what do they do, because where I work has never used social workers before. They're just now understanding the role of social workers and how they could benefit from having more social workers at their facility. So that's been

> frustrating because they still seem to be a little bit entrenched in that medical model and they want to step out of that.

Fourth, four study participants addressed basic socio-economic factors of young populations as a challenge because a lot of youth live in situations that are unpredictable. For example, Jim said that some children do not know where they are going to be living in six months. Cora said, “it’s just the student is not progressing the way you want them to or they are choosing sabotage what you’re trying to do with them.” According to Bob, a multiplicity of immediate problems that the client may be having and want you to fix also becomes barriers for a strengths-based practice.

Fifth, three participants emphasized the importance of adultism. Mia defined adultism as “oppressing young people based on their age, or responding to their behaviors or their actions in a certain way based on their age.” David illustrated that young people have bought into a system where an adult tells them what to do; therefore, when youth workers allow them to make their own decisions the youth do not want to. “They are like well, everyone else told me what to do, why don’t you?” More seriously, Mia stressed that youth professionals need to make efforts not to stereotype or oppress young people, because a lot of adults do not feel like they are oppressive when they work with youth. By pointing out adultism, she described “it changes the culture of youth agency in how young people feel welcomed and valued. According to her, “we often overlook adults as kind of you can’t do that because you’re young. Or you’re too young for this. Or you don’t understand because you’re young.”

She mentions some examples,

> There’s a lot of examples of that. When young people are sitting at the table, the only time, you know, you’re in a meeting with a young person. The only time they

> refer to the young people to speak is if they want them to speak on behalf of other young people. That's an example of adultism. If we were in a meeting and we were planning, let's just say we were planning a community service project. And the only time, if you're the young person and I'm the adult, that I ask you a question, is if I want, well, where are we going to have this community service project? Where would you, as a young person, want to have it? It's just always referring to them to speak on behalf of other young people, and they don't have any other meaningful roles. Can they plan the agenda? Can they evaluate the project? Can they go out and do research? It's giving them some meaningful roles and not just they're the youth experts. But there's a lot of different examples of adultism. So many examples.

She emphasized that understanding adultism is important because it affects how young people respond to youth professionals. "A youth worker is not a parent, and it's different. I think a lot of times we cross over into being the parent of the young person." Although young people are not in the same place as adults for many reasons and "so we have to balance it." And "we have to give them meaningful roles and let them reach their fullest potential."

Sixth, three social workers mentioned criticism on the strengths perspective as a challenging aspect of the strengths-based practice. For example, Bob said "Crisis that you would have to address immediately. I think that would be a hindrance." The expression "Pollyanna" was also mentioned in the interviews of two social worker participants. According to Sarah, "It can sound very Pollyanna and everything, but it is hard. It's hard to find strengths in some of our clients." She continued to say, "We need to recognize it's hard and then support people who are doing it and encourage them, and have opportunities where they can talk about specific stories." Another social worker, Pam also addressed that people think "it is kind of a Pollyanna way, too

positive and too idealistic and not reality-based." According to her, "you can't sound the alarm when there's a situation going on that really needs to be addressed quickly."

Seventh, two participants pointed out the attitudes of youth workers as a challenging aspect. The role of a youth worker is expected to help facilitate youth development; however, youth workers tend to see themselves as the main actors in youth development. Moreover, according to David, youth work tends to be what the adult wants to do as opposed to what the young person wants to do. He described that sometimes youth work seems to be dependent upon the ideal practitioner because they are passionate about it as opposed to "all of us working towards the same goal." Sarah said that the inability to see something from the client's perspective hinder youth professionals from implementing a strengths-based practice. She emphasized looking at the client as the expert in his or her own life.

Eighth, two participants described that youth development work becomes a very programmatic endeavor as opposed to a person-specific endeavor. For instance, according to David, it seems that "we are not working with youth themselves, but we are working to prevent them from engaging in risky behavior." Thus without true understanding of youth development, "all we do is to operate a series of programs that fill space and time with young people rather than having them connected to the broader outcomes that we know will help them become successful." Youth development is not just a philosophy that gets implemented into practice, it is a philosophy that informs policy and organizational practice. If we do not have policy and organizational practice and supervisory practices that support that, then "all we end up doing is being one drop in a bucket trying to work with young people as opposed to having a concerted effort in which everyone's moving in the same direction."

Table 8

Supporting Factors and Challenges of Youth Development Practice

	Supporting Factors	Challenging Factors
Mindset or Attitude	Understanding youth situation (Y2, Y4) A positive mindset (Y6, Y9, S3) A positive personality (S1)	Inability to see things from client's perspective (Y1, Y5, S1)
Faith and Spirituality	Experiences with youth in the church (Y1, S7) Spiritual development (Y6) Faith for youth (Y8, S8) Religious inspiration (S6, S9)	
Youth Participation	Youth ownership in decision making (Y1, S4) Making youth feel like they matter (Y3, Y5)	
Program characteristics	School-based program (Y8) Consistent Mentorship (Y4) Being part of a multidisciplinary team (S2)	Whimsical in nature (Y1) Relying on volunteers (Y4, S3) Recruitment of youth (Y5, Y6) No family dinner (Y6, Y9)
Mentor for professionals	Having mentors for professionals (Y7, Y9)	
Resources and funding		Limited resources and funding, (Y1, Y5, Y6, Y7, S2, S4, S6) Getting the volunteers (Y8)
Getting people		Getting people to buy into work's belief (Y2, Y4, Y8) People's perception about helping people (S4)
Client factors		Socio-economic factors of youth (Y3, Y4, S2, S7)
Adultism		Adult tells youth what to do (Y1, Y5, S4)
General criticism		Criticism on the strengths perspective (S1, S4, S7)
Youth policy		No broad youth development policy (Y1, S6)

Table 8 shows a summary of the supporting factors and challenges of strengths-based youth development practice. Although more challenging factors are appeared, each theme related to both supportive and challenging factors. In particular, youth professionals' mindset or attitude can be a supportive factor if it is youth-centered. However it becomes a challenge to youth development practice if the professional' attitude has inability to see something from the client's perspective. Characteristics of programs and environment are also compared as supporting and challenging factors to youth development practice.

Agency context. Study participants were asked to identify supportive agency context and agency barriers to practice youth development work. Eight themes emerged from the participants' responses including agency mission, executive director, staff training and education, size and rules, funding, and agency politics.

First, seven participants emphasized mission, philosophy, or policy of organization as important factors in relation to agency context of a strengths-based practice. David said that youth professionals have to be in an organization with the same philosophy to support youth development work. Diane states, "If workers work for an agency that does not believe in strengths-based perspective or does not believe in positive youth development, it is going to be very hard for workers." Mia stressed having a culture and an agency that supports youth development. Doug emphasized supportive agency policy and philosophy. According to Doug, since the philosophy of his agency is to take a strengths-based perspective, "anybody that comes into our agency, this is what they're informed of and what they get. And anybody who takes a perspective outside of that is outside of the norm." Pam stated that the place where she works is open to new ideas and that supports strengths-based practice. According to Kati, "it is the tone of the agency to really want to be walking in partnership with clients in a meaningful way." For the

supportive agency context, Tim mentioned the appropriate fit between youth worker's philosophy and the organization's philosophy. "If the agency is based on the same belief as the worker, it is better for the worker."

Second, nine participants identified executive director of the organization or agency and board of directors as significant agency factors for a strengths-based practice. Harry mentioned the different visions about working with youth that the program staff and executive director could have as a factor for a strengths-based practice. Even though the staff put in much work and time for youth development, they were told by their director that "they're not going to do it."

> We developed a youth model where all of our children, all of our youth would come into our center and see a youth caseworker, and that youth caseworker was going to evaluate that child and based on the needs, refer him to either our sports program, our arts program, our Latino development program, and different programs, and then refer the parent to this program or that program. We worked on that for 2 years. We thought all we need to do now is get some funding for it. We knew that because we're one of the very few Latino agencies, we knew we were going to get some money. Well, we have a new president and she said no, we're not going to do that program no more.

He added that "I can write a grant myself but in most agencies you have to go through someone above you to approve it." Mary responded that the board of directors that they have and their dedication to provide the services free of charge to districts allowed them to be successful in implementing their youth development programs because districts are "just so strapped with everything else they have to do." Sarah mentioned that supervisors need to be flexible and understand different styles of work support strengths-based practice. Sometimes the work is

needed in the evening and sometime on a weekend. She stated that “you can’t implement it if you don’t have a supportive supervisor. Your supervisor has to be on board with this.” Pam stated that having a board of directors educated in the strengths-based practice is an important factor to support the implementation of strengths-based practice.

Third, seven participants identified the importance of sharing the same philosophy of the strengths perspective or positive youth development with a colleague and department in an organization. David said it will be a frustrating situation if “you have colleagues who come from a deficit model” or who believe that adults are to be everything in the lives of young people. Diane stated that workers have to have staff that buy into the strengths-based philosophy. In addition, she added that for an agency to support it, it needs to come from all levels, not necessarily all departments, but also all levels of management. Everybody has to understand what the positive youth development is and the strengths perspective is. “Or it’s going to be very difficult to implement across an agency, especially a large agency that has multiple locations.” So “you need to make sure that each department has the buy-in of that philosophy. Because if you have one department that’s doing it and another department that’s not, it’s not going to work.”

Mia identified the staff factor as an important agency context for the implementation of a strengths-based practice. According to her, having other workers who may not understand positive youth development and having young people that may be so used to other models are frustrating factors. For another youth worker, Tom, a staff turnover was a challenge and so he had to train new staff. Pam mentioned “some of the policies that have been set up in some of the different departments” as barriers to a strengths-based practice.

Fourth, in relation to the above mentioned staff and department factors, nine participants described training, knowledge, and education issue as significant for the implementation of strengths-based practice. David said that supportive agency context should be situations in which organizations train youth workers to identify what outcomes they are looking for and then they start to track those outcomes with the programs. By the time that the youth leave the program, youth workers have started to document the progress that young person has made.

By pointing out the lacking system of promotion in youth field, he suggested examples of school teachers. According to him, teachers can get an advanced degree in teaching, but that does not mean that the teacher will leave teaching. Some people who get their master's degree in teaching continue to be teachers because that is what they want to do. And if some people want to become administrators so they become principles, vice-principals, and "there's a way to do that." However, "what we have to do in the field is support people to continue to be practitioners"

Diane described that the training and understanding the concepts was the foundation to support the implementation of strengths-based practice. One youth worker at a nationally well-known youth organization said that they have training program about their organizational mission and youth development. Mia also stressed continual training around strengths-based approach. Doug mentioned clinical meetings at his agency where the staff have training. It gives supportive connections with other workers and employees. Sarah, a social worker, mentioned the lack of knowledge as agency barriers. Pam, another social worker, responded that her agency allows training and that helps staff learn skill sets and continue to grow skills. She also mentioned that having case consulting time at her agency is supportive for staff to process the plan and to figure out what they need to do to continue to have those supports for their clients.

Fifth, nine participants identified size, rules, and procedures of the agency as significant factors for a strengths-based practice. David stated that youth work tends to be in large groups. "We move groups of young people from one program area to another program area, from one program focus to another program focus, and we have very little time to do one-on-one or one-to -five" and so supportive context should be in situations in which youth workers can work with young people in small groups as well as one-on-one individualized attention. Diane pointed out that a large agency becomes more of a bureaucracy and forgets what the real reason is behind the work. She recommended that smaller agencies have the benefits of being very grassroots and being able to keep close philosophically to why they are serving youth and what is important for youth to be successful. Sarah responded that "if you really want to do it you need to have not hundreds of clients." She said that twenty cases at one time are the most to do strengths-based practice. She added that strengths-based practice requires a lot of time because it is about listening and building relationships. "If your supervisor thinks that you're going to do an assessment in half an hour, that's a barrier if you're too time-focused."

Policies and procedures can hinder youth workers from implementing a strengths-based practice. Sarah mentioned that agencies that have too many rules and regulations becomes barrier. Accordingly, agencies that are a little looser in their policies are helpful to support strengths-based practice. Agencies that are willing to make exceptions to rules and to look at things on a case by case basis do a better job. Bob also stated that "working in a bureaucracy" hinders youth workers from implementing a strengths-based practice because "you have so many rules to follow and so many cases until you do not have time to practice or be effective with the client." If job duties or expectations are so rigid or so structured where we can not have that creativity to practice the models, then that also makes it very hard to do a strengths-based practice.

Sixth, nine study participants pointed out the sustained funding as an important factor. For example, one youth worker described sustained funding for youth development programs as the opposite of the supportive part of a strengths-based practice. “But more than anything it’s this culture that we have in the States in which we chase program dollars and so the intention is not to develop healthy young people, it’s to have enough dollars to keep the organizational doors open.” Diane described limited and inconsistent funding as one aspect that hinder youth workers from implementing positive youth development. “You have to be very creative with the resources that you have.” As expressed by a social worker, it goes without saying; “having to have a longstanding resource for funding” is always critical. It was said that “more money, more room, more staff.” It is noteworthy that a social worker, Kati emphasized having non-governmental funding to do strengths-based practice. “Not to go for trying to apply for grants from governmental entities where they’re going to dictate what programs need to look like.” In order to explain it, she stressed that her organization “chooses not to” apply for government funding and mentioned an example of a youth organization with gospel missions. They also choose not to take any governmental dollars that will dictate how they do what they feel they need to do with young people.

> I think agencies that struggle or agencies that run around feeling a little bit more schizophrenic are those that stray from their mission or those that chase the dollars and then say oh, man, this isn’t really what we’re about. We don’t do that here. It’s very purposeful that we don’t do that so that we don’t run into those kinds of, where you don’t have the support to do things like strengths-based case management.

Finally, two study participants recognized agency politics and cooperation do matter to do better youth development work. For example, Harry stated an example of agency politics that

keeps them from doing their work. He experienced a case that his director did not like them partnering with another agency as follow:

> Harry: Sometimes when our bosses don't like us partnering with another agency, another agency that deals with youth came to us and said hey, we have this project that we want to do with you, and we're going to get about $200,000 for 2 years. And we'll split the money and we'll help each other do this project. Well, one of my bosses didn't like this agency.
>
> Researcher: So refused it?
>
> Harry: And they said no, we don't want to get involved with that agency. And I said this has nothing to do with you liking them. It has to do with us working with youth. So a lot of it is office politics that really keeps us from doing our work.

Another aspect is difficulties in inter-agency cooperation. Although there is no one agency that is ever going to be able to serve every youth, Mary described that other agencies are territorial and do not want to cooperate. "I like to partner because I think that together we can achieve a whole lot more, but then there are other agencies out there who don't like to partner." She also said the reason "it's all back to money, but what it really comes down to is funding."

Table 9 summarizes the supportive and challenging agency context by seven themes described above. Although it shows more supportive agency context than challenging context, the supportive context and challenging context were not mutually exclusive. This means that a supportive context can be a challenging context at the same time if it is the opposite situation. For instance, although "having the same philosophy of agency" can be a supportive context, it also can be a challenging context for the implementation of a strengths-based practice if a youth professional has a different personal philosophy from strengths-based agency mission. Each

theme impacts the other. For example, agency policy can affect management of the organization and philosophy of staff can affect training opportunities of staff. Funding factor and organizational rules can impact on training and agency politics and cooperation.

Table 9

Important Agency Context

	Supportive Agency Context	Challenging Agency Context
Mission, Philosophy, Policy	Having the same philosophy of agency (Y1,Y3) Having a culture and policy for strengths-based practice (Y5, Y9) Open to new ideas (S4) Believe in the mission (S5)	
Director, Board of directors	Dedicated board of directors (Y8, S4) Flexible supervisors who understand Different styles of work (S1)	Different vision between agency/boss and staff (Y2) Having colleagues come from a deficit model (Y1)
Staff, Department	Having staff sharing the same philosophy (Y1,Y3, Y5) Sharing the same philosophy from all levels of management (Y3, S4)	Having youth that used to other models (Y5) A staff turnover (Y6)
Training, Knowledge, Education	Continuing training for workers (Y1, Y3, Y4, Y5, S1, S4) Having regular staff meetings (Y9)	Lacking system of promotion (Y1)
Size, Rules, Procedures	Small groups and one-on-one (Y1) Less bureaucracy (Y3, S1, S7) Less rules and regulations (S1, S4) External incentives to youth (Y6)	
Funding	Fund, room, and staff (Y7, S6) Having no governmental money (S5)	Inconsistent and sustained funding (Y1, Y3, S4)
Cooperation		Agency politics and cooperation (Y2, Y8)

Commonalities and differences between social workers and non social work participants were also identified regarding important agency context to practice a strengths-based youth

development work. Each group commonly emphasizes organization's mission and policy factor, training and education factor, size and rules of agency, and funding factor. However, more social workers described the factor of size and rules of agency than non social workers and more non social work participants stressed training and knowledge factor. One social worker and five non social work participants stated staff and department factor as supportive or challenging agency context for the implementation of a strengths-based practice.

Suggestions for Better Strengths-based Youth Development Practice

This study concerns the nature of a strengths-based positive youth development practice and its implications for enhancing social work practice with children and youth. As presented in the previous sections, youth professionals' guiding practice principles of positive youth development, perceptions of the youth-adult relationships, and understandings of the benefits and challenges of professional practice were investigated based on the data analysis of the interviews with 18 youth professionals. This section reports the study participants' understanding of youth development as a profession and suggestions for better youth development practice as it relates to the social work practice and education.

Perceptions of Youth Development as a Profession

In order to better understand the recommendations of youth professionals in the study, this section begins with their perceptions of the youth development field as a profession and its relationship with social work field. Youth professionals' understandings of the similarities and differences between youth development practice and social work practice are explored as well as their suggestions for better strengths-based practice and social work education.

Study participants were asked to answer whether positive youth development work is a distinct profession or not. Twelve participants stated that youth development work is a distinct

profession or can be a profession, whereas some participants understood that the field is not seen as a valid profession. Among them, nine participants including four youth workers with no social work education and five professionals with social work degrees said that social work overlaps with a lot of things in the youth work field and youth development work is a part of social work.

Youth development is a profession. Seven participants said the strengths-based youth development field is a distinct profession. For example, Harry said youth development can be a profession. However, he did not think that a person who works with youth has to be a youth development professional. According to him, as long as youth workers have the basic concepts of being a good person, they can do youth work because "we're talking about day-to-day life skill teaching." Jim stated it as a distinct profession. He explained that learning how to help youth succeed and how to interact with young people and how to approach them are kinds of "its own niche." Mary understood that youth development field is a profession because the field is not really "going out there and giving them clothes or feeding them or health-wise." She stated that what they do is a little harder for people to understand because "the measurables are harder to reach." The results are not tangible and long term. According to her, the youth development field is more like a business than a social agency. It's almost like a production because they are producing something.

Sarah, a social worker, answered that youth work is a profession because "it's hard work and a career." She described that people need to be passionate about youth work and "not just do it like cashier at a shop." It is not a temporary work. A lot of people are in it because they really care about youth. "I don't think that the same person who is working at the Gap is necessarily the right person to do youth work." Cathy, another social worker, described that youth work field is a distinct profession because it takes a special person to do it. "It takes that person that's not

afraid to go where the kids are, that's not afraid to be honest with them and be open with them. They're not afraid to show them respect in spite of what they might get back." Tim also believed that youth development field is a distinct profession because "they are working." According to him, they are professing it professionally. "They need to have qualifications. They are doing a specific job with a specific product, which are the youth, and you have to understand youth psychology, you have to understand social forces, forces that work on the family, social problems like gangs, drug problems."

Youth development needs to be a profession. Five participants explained that youth development field needs to become a distinct profession. For instance, Mia does not necessarily believe that it is distinct right now, but she said it needs to become a more distinct profession "in that we need our own set of language that we use in our terms." She also stated that there are no real defined qualifications for the youth worker in terms of a degree. "There's not real salary range for youth workers." She stated several examples as follow:

> You know if you're going to be a physician that you need 4 years of medical school, then you do your residency, and so that's definition. For a youth worker you could be an after school worker and not even finish high school. To that's a large continuum. When you look at the profession of youth development and youth work, we have to begin to put those things in there to make it a distinct profession.

She went on to say,

> You have a great opportunity to help young people develop themselves into adulthood, and that's why it should be a profession. Because the need is there. And not to just develop them from an academic standpoint, but develop them in an emotional and a social standpoint. The opportunity is there, and that's why it needs

> to be a profession around that. When you look at doctors or attorneys there's a need for people to be healthy physically, and so it's a need for us to have the health care profession. The same thing with the law profession. So the need for people to be defended, for justice, and all of that. So there's a need for young people to be able to reach their developmental outcomes and goals in life.

Tom also stated that youth work has existed since the beginning of "the Industrial Revolution back in the 40s and 50s" and it needs to be a profession. According to Amy, a social worker, "it is growing and I think it is becoming its own separate focus." Amy also said that "people don't necessarily see positive youth development as something that requires professionalism or professionals or training." Linda, another social worker, said that it is not a profession now because no youth-serving organizations are providing mandated services.

> Most of those youth organizations, positive development, are voluntary kinds of organizations that developed from the community to help support families, or was community kind of organized rather than mandatory, you know, child welfare. It's only involved by some way of authority, where the law dictates their involvement. So that's why there's folks that are in that field. But they don't get paid enough, they don't have the kind of support for the work that they do. Often their salaries are dictated by governments. States make decisions and cuts.

Youth development is not recognized as a profession. Five participants answered youth development field is not a profession. For example, David stated that it is not a valid profession. "In the social service field it's seen as something you do until you can find something else, a better job." One social worker, Kati, said that the youth development field has "no big difference or a lot of other needed skills that would make it need to have its own profession."

According to Doug, a non-social work participant, although there are a lot of people who want to professionalize youth development work, there are other people that continue to bring it down for whatever reason. In order to make youth development a profession, he suggested that universities need to take hold of it and have a degree in it "just like an early education degree or counseling degree or social work degree." There is nothing that necessarily separates itself apart from another field. He also said that program standards need to be developed. Until there is a further definition of what the field is, he stated that youth development is seen more as a philosophy of work rather than a direct practice of work. He added that if the youth development field is a distinct profession, youth workers need to have certification, possible licensure, or national accreditation, and a standardized title. He did not see that being recognized as a formal profession across the field.

> Unfortunately, though, it seems like the closer you get to human service the less people make, and the closer you get to youth, even less that people make. And it's because the funding doesn't necessarily support professionalization of the position. And it's unreimbursable. It's unlike counseling.

Youth development is a part of social work. Interestingly, among 18 study participants, nine youth professionals stated that youth development is a part of the social work field regardless of their educational background. Four youth professionals with no social work education (David, Diane, Jim, and Mia) mentioned several academic disciplines including social work as a potential field for the professionalization of youth development. For example, Jim included criminal justice, psychology, social work, and education as a degree that youth development can be a part of it. Mia said that the youth development field is a part of social work. However, she

does not necessarily know if a youth development professional can be a social worker, whereas a social worker can be a youth development professional.

In particular, five social workers (Sarah, Cora, Amy, Kati, and Cathy) among the nine interviewed social workers said that youth development field is a part of the social work profession. Sarah described that youth work field is "almost like a subset of social work." Although there are youth workers who are very good at work with non-social work backgrounds, "at the very least it's a social service area" and the "best youth workers are going to be trained social workers first." She explained "you've got social work here, and then you've got people who work in hospital social work and you've got people who work in the mental health field, and you've got people who work with youth."

Amy considers youth development field as part of social work; "I see so many things being social work." It would benefit from having a social work aspect to it. According to her, "when you work with children you also have to address their family context and sometimes that means providing extra support to families, helping them with whatever kinds of needs that they might have, because in supporting the family I think that you are supporting positive youth development." Kati also stated that if a social work practitioner were working in youth development, it can be a part of social work. She said that youth work field is not limited to social work. Social workers can be involved in youth work, but that youth work is not exclusive to only social work profession. It could be other disciplines, such as education, depending on its focus. So there could be educators who are involved in youth development work. The difference would be what impact or what focus we have in the life of the youth. The youth work field is a bigger umbrella than the work that social workers do with youth and it is a multidisciplinary field of practice.

Cathy also emphasized social work relationship to youth development field.

They may not be a licensed social worker, but they're going to be a social worker, because when you deal with our youth today, some of those youth can have a lot of problems. They've been neglected, they've been abused, they've been shot at, and you need to be able to handle that.

Table 10

Youth Development as a Profession and Social Work

	Non Social Worker Views	Social Worker Views
Profession	Day-to-day life skill (Y2) Learning how to help kids (Y4) More like a business (Y8)	It is hard work and a career (S1) Takes a special person to do (S6) Professing it professionally (S9)
Need to be a profession	No defined qualifications and degree (Y5) Youth work has been since 1940s (Y6)	Not necessarily requires professionalism (S3) Youth organizations are not providing mandated services (S8)
Not a Profession	It is seen as something to do until find a better job (Y1) University take hold of it (Y9)	No big difference or a lot of other needed skills (S5)
Part of Social Work	It is a part of social work (Y1) Social worker can be a youth development professional (Y5) It can be part of other disciplines, criminal justice, psychology, education (Y3, Y4)	A subset of social work (S1, S6) Social work overlaps with youth development (S2) Approaching as a social worker is a real benefit (S3) Not limited to social work (S5)

Table 10 summarizes study participants' perceptions of youth development as a profession and relationships to social work profession by social workers and non social worker participants. It shows more common understanding between two groups and no significant differences were identified in the four themes of "profession," "need to be a profession," "not a profession," and "part of social work." For instance, three social workers perceived the youth development field

as a profession and three non social work participants also perceived it as a profession. One social worker and two non social work participants said that youth development field is not a profession. Five social workers perceived that youth development as a part of social work and four non social work participants said the same answers.

Similarities and Differences between Youth Development and Social Work

Study participants were asked to answer to the question, "Do you think that youth development professionals are different from social workers?" Many participants addressed the usefulness of social work and meaningful contribution of social workers for positive youth development. Study participants also identified similarities and differences between youth development workers and social workers.

Usefulness of social work. Fourteen participants presented social work's contribution and usefulness to youth development practice. Some of the respondents identified the role of social workers who are working at their organizations and agencies. "They function as youth development workers" (Jim) and others are "not necessarily our youth advocate or youth development, but they do our mental health" (Doug). Diane has seen positive youth development become implemented and more outwardly discussed in the area of runaway and homeless youth. She states, "that's a real important tool for social workers to use when they're working with youth that have been removed from the home." Jim addressed, "the social workers we've hired have all worked out really well." Mary said, "we have a program for girls whose moms are in prison and we work with the moms and work with the girls, and we have some social workers that actually work in that program." Her perception is that "social workers get involved in a situation when there's a problem." She mentioned that "they have social workers at the schools

who a lot of times are the ones that are building connectors, that oversee the matches between the kids."

Among social work participants, Sarah stated that "youth workers who are trained social workers are more holistic in their approach." Cora had similar perception of how she saw social workers. "I think that social workers see the whole person. And I think it always amazes me how I see things differently from teachers or parents." "We give the clients perspective. We're advocates, so we just try to learn all we can about the kid and how we can help the kid." She added, "Bringing connections together and collaboration with other people that can help. We're very resourceful." Amy stated that social workers are very well suited because of their special training and the different things that they learn in school that can be applied to youth work. To her understanding, the strengths perspective is "a very social work based idea."

> I don't ever hear about ecology majors or people like that really thinking of people in those terms. So I think that our education, especially a lot of people who might like a psychology degree or something, they don't necessarily do practicums. So they don't have a lot of that hands-on experience. I think that's really beneficial and something that makes social workers well-suited to work with youth.

She went on to say,

> And just kind of the basic principles and philosophy that we're taught. Having the whole idea of respecting our clients and trying to be fair and trying to be non-judgmental, reserving judgment, and things like that. I think that some people who don't necessarily have that training maybe know that they shouldn't do those things, but maybe they don't feel a professional obligation for an ethical issue in

confidentiality or with some other things that social workers, it's something that's really been something that's very ingrained in our training that you're ethical.

Pam said **"**they told me they hired me was because I had worked with teenagers and young adults." And "they need social workers and they need people who understand how to relate to people, because they're responsible for the health of a whole community." Cathy also emphasized that a good youth worker is going to be a social worker and part of the problem with some of youth workers is "they're not social workers." According to Tim, social workers exist because there are social problems and society needs a way to assist people to the extent possible. "Every society makes an estimate of how much they want to help people to integrate into society so that they can go along with society."

Although many youth professionals identified the usefulness and contribution of social work and social workers to positive youth development, some participants indicated that social workers do not have direct training on positive youth development practice. For example, David indicated, "Just because you go to social work school doesn't mean you are ready to work with young people." There is no formal educational training for youth workers in social work school. "We assume that they're social workers, but they're not. All social workers aren't youth workers. Social workers could work with the elderly. Social workers could work with children."

In addition, only a few youth development organizations have social workers and some participants did not value social workers. Most social workers at youth-serving organizations work for other programs than youth development. For example, Tom stated that their organization has no hired social workers in their youth development department, while there are social workers in the shelter service department. According to Doug, most of their clinicians are social workers but in "youth development, nobody. And not only that, one of the youth advocates

we do have is an artist." He said that this is because "the salary doesn't match with what they feel they can get somewhere else." This understanding is supported by a social worker, Linda. She stated that there is no any money in youth development field for social workers and society is not placing value on youth work.

According to Amy, the organization does not seek out social workers to fill some positions that they have for youth development. "Maybe people don't take youth work as seriously or think of it more as something that's fun that you do rather than something that trained professionals do." According to Pam, there are staff called social worker without having real educational background in social work. "There might actually be like one or two social workers. And then everybody else that works there, they call themselves social workers, but they're not."

Similarities between youth development and social work. Nine participants described similarities between youth development work and social work in terms of both are human services and helping job, same roles of professionals with similar skills, and having the same level of empathy and compassion for humans. First, three participants stated that both are human services and helping jobs. David stated that "there is a connection between social work and youth work just like there are similarities between being a dentist and being a physician. But it's not the same." Jim described similarities between social work and youth development workers as follows:

> To some extent I think your background dictates how you maybe approach the job when you begin. I worked in juvenile delinquency so I had a certain way of approaching it whereas somebody who's a social worker or somebody who's a psychology major may have other ways of approaching kids.

Pam, a social worker, understood that youth workers are similar to social workers in that they are in a helping role. Youth workers are also focused on a client. They are also operationalizing their work in such a way that the agency has carved out for them to do it. “So in that way I think we are alike.” Cathy stated that social workers and youth workers are in a caring field and “it requires some personal input.”

Second, four participants described that youth workers are not different from social workers because youth workers have the same role and similar skills with social workers. According to Diane, all workers did the same kind of work in the area that she worked in. All workers had equal skills and she even had seen too many people with skills far and beyond what a social worker has.

> There are some very clear guidelines as far as social workers can only do certain types of work with families. And I disagree with that philosophy. I don’t agree with those standards because I’ve seen too many people with skills far and beyond what a social worker has, and just because they don’t have the social work degree, they can’t do that job.

Mia found similar role in both fields. “As a youth development professional you have to look out for the social needs of young people.” Tom said that he is learning that there is a whole lot of blurring between a social worker and a youth worker. “Those two jobs often have the same kind of role.” Rita mentioned “the same goal” as one of the commonalties between youth professionals and social work. “They both want happy, self-reliant adults who are beneficial members of society. I think that’s what the end result of both of those tracks is.”

Third, two participants stated that both fields are similar in that they have the same level of empathy and compassion for humans in general. Cathy pointed out compassion as one of the

similarities between youth workers and social workers. There are a lot of good youth workers that “go way above and beyond their job, and are not social workers.” And those are the ones that have the compassion. “You’re going to find that in both fields.” “They have the respect. They have the morality. And those are the ones that are teaching the kids what it is they need to know. And you’re going to find that in both fields.”

Table 11

Comparison of Similarities between Youth Development and Social Work

	Non Social Worker View	Social Worker View
Services	Being a dentist vs. being a physician (Y1) Human services and helping jobs (Y4) Look out for the needs (Y5)	Helping work and focus on a client (S4) A caring field and requires some personal input (S6)
Roles and skills	Doing the same work with similar skills (Y3, Y6, Y7)	Sharing youth work with social worker (S5)
Characteristics of professionals	Same level of empathy and compassion (Y4)	The same compassion (S6)

A comparison of similarities between youth development and social work perceived by social workers and non social work participants are summarized in Table 11. As already described above, each group commonly identified that youth development and social work are similar in terms that both are human services and helping jobs, there are the same roles of professionals with similar skills, and both emphasizes having the same level of empathy and compassion for humans. More non social work participants state similarities between youth development field and social work than social workers. In particular, more non social work participants pointed out that youth development professionals are doing the same work with similar skills with social workers.

Differences between youth development worker and social worker. All eighteen participants identified the differences between youth workers and social workers. The differences include youth specific field vs. people including children and youth in general, educational philosophy vs. service oriented, involvement in families vs. dealing with everything, involvement after problems vs. before problems, good at being compassionate vs. good at advocating, license required vs. not required, and social work degree vs. combined majors. Having a training and technical assistance provider is also mentioned as one of the different characteristics of the youth development field.

First, two participant stated that youth development professionals are different from social workers because social workers are working for broader population. According to Doug, although it depends on what we define as social work, social workers are working to help people in general. However, youth development professionals are working specifically with young people.

Second, two participant said that youth development is more of an educational philosophy, whereas social work is very much service-oriented. Bob indicated that youth work is more of supervision, very structured, and less complex than social work.

Third, five participants indicated family factor of social workers as a different part from youth workers. Harry stated that social workers are involved in families. Youth workers are looking at youth as a whole person and deal with everything that comes with the youth such as school, relationships, and personality. Tom understood that youth development field has emerged from the time when mothers began to work. “All that happened after World War II when both parents had the ability to work and increase their status.” Cathy, a social worker, stressed that

most youth workers deal with what is in front of them. They don't deal with everything the youth carried along with them. Another social worker, Bob, stated that a social worker would be more apt to communicate with families in regards to problems that the youth may be having.

According to Linda, social workers are different from general youth workers because social workers are more skilled at dealing with youth issues and family. In fact, a lot of youth issues involve family or other connections within a community. From a generalist perspective social workers are trained to interact at any level with the family system or other system. Tim also emphasized that social workers are working with the whole family system and the whole community system, whereas the youth workers need a less global understanding. They have a more specific and more precise objective of helping youth to fit into a milieu and be able to function effectively in a given setting.

Fourth, according to three participants, social workers are usually involved after something has become a problem, whereas the focus of youth development is working with the child to make sure something does not become a problem. Rita perceived that social workers get involved in a situation when there is a problem and they try to solve a problem. But youth development professionals focus more on moving the youth towards a common goal. Youth development is not preventing or fixing a problem. It is building strong youth all the time. Bob stated that social workers address more serious problems. Tim described that social workers exist because there are social problems and society needs a way to assist people to the extent possible.

Fifth, seven participants emphasized that social workers bring a different aspect and approach to youth. According to Jim, social workers are good at being compassionate and good at advocating for their clients, while youth workers are good at advocating for kids. Among social work participants, Sarah said that social workers are completely different in their

perspective. They are more holistic in their approach. Cora also said that social workers see the whole person from the client perspective. They are advocates and try to educate the people that are working with the child.

Social workers are very resourceful and also bring connections and collaboration with other people that can help. According to Amy, social workers try to approach situations with some kind of a problem-solving mentality and looking at the big picture. Social workers bring sense of acute awareness of the work (Pam). So although youth workers with a non social work education background are good at what they do, social workers bring the added piece of having the lens that "they're able to survey a situation and critically analyze it" and then determine fairly quickly an action plan. Social workers also have a tendency to see people horizontally rather than vertically. Social workers are good at eliciting stories and talking. They are also good at assessing the broad systems that impact any individual, whether it is a youth or an adult because they are looking at all of different life domains that impact that particular person.

Pam illustrated some hands-on advocacy and activities of youth workers. "They're handing out flyers about services. They're meeting community leaders and doing some bridge-building. They go to community meetings. They will support their clients, even go to their house and be with them. And youth workers meet city council people, lawmakers, and legislators for youth advocacy."

Table 12 summarizes the study participants' perceptions of the differences between youth development and social work practice focused on four themes of population, main focus, problem involvement, and approaches and activities. Social work participants state more differences between the two practices than non social workers. In particular, four social workers described different focuses on family involvement of social work practice, whereas only one non

social worker mentioned the same issue. Also, five social workers addressed different approaches and activities of social work practice compared to youth development practice. However, two non social work participants stated the same issues of different approaches between the two practices. This might be caused that non social work participants are less familiar with the social work profession. As expressed by some participants, they also have limited experiences with social worker in their youth work careers.

Table 12

Differences between Youth Development Practice and Social Work Practice

	Youth Development Practice	Social Work Practice
Population	Working with youth (Y9, S1)	Working to help people (Y9, S1)
Main Focus (Family Involvement)	Looking at youth as a person (Y2) Dealing with youth issue (S6) Dealing with everything-school, relationships, and personality (Y2) Need a less global understanding (S9) More specific, precise objective (S9)	Involved in families (Y2) Dealing with the whole thing (S6) More apt to communicate with families (S7) More skilled at youth & family (S8) Working with the whole system (S9)
Problem Involvement	Make sure not become problems (Y4) Focus on building, moving forward (Y7)	Involved after problems (Y4) Problem-solving mentality (Y7, S3, S7, S9)
Approaches & activities	Good at advocating youth (Y4, S4) Hands-on activities (S4) Do not have availability (S6) An educational philosophy (Y9)	Being compassionate (Y4, S4) More holistic in perspective (S1, S8) See from client perspective (S2) Very much service-oriented (Y9) Bring sense of work awareness (S4) Resourceful & collaborations (S2)

Sixth, youth workers are not required to have licensed qualification. Harry described that any adult who has a positive passion for young people can be a youth worker. If someone who has passion and studied youth development and knew the different stages of what youth go through, they can run a youth program. Diane and Cathy stated that youth development

professionals were not required to be a licensed social worker. It has to be someone that enjoys being around youth.

Seventh, the youth development field has professionals from diverse majors of academic discipline. For example, Harry said that psychology, education, and social work are major fields of university education included in their position advertisement of a youth-serving organization where he is working. Diane stated that youth workers can have a sociology degree or a psychology degree, and the strength in having different disciplines working with youth; each brought a different perspective. Rita understood that youth development is a field of a combination of running a business, supervising staff, and building a structure for long term outcomes for young participants. Workers can major in recreation or education and learn how to plan a program or a curriculum.

Eighth, one of the strengths of the youth development area that other fields could learn from is having a training and technical assistance provider that really focuses on positive youth development practice. As far as the youth development is concerned, all youth workers need some level of training because most workers have not done any kind of work with specific population. Diane illustrates that runaway, homeless youth, and youth live on the street for the training areas of youth development. However, Rita acknowledged that social workers have more training than youth workers.

According to Sarah, social workers are more professional and they will be better at keeping professional boundaries and they come in with more knowledge in general. A lot of youth workers are not trained professionally. According to Pam, social worker's training has been so specialized in understanding theories, paradigms, and research-based models. Bob indicated that social workers observe behaviors and know what those behaviors mean, but youth workers do

not have that knowledge. Linda stated that social workers are trained in terms of looking at systemic change and helping to look at the big picture with the youth that impact that particular youth's life, whereas other professions may be looking at a specific area and may not be necessary looking at the broader picture. She thinks that we have to look at the broader picture with our youth if we want to help them because there are so many issues that impact them.

Table 13 shows a summary of the study participants' perceptions of the differences between youth development and social work focused on three themes of qualification, academic field and degrees, and education and training. There are significant differences between social workers and non social work participants' views of qualification, academic field, and training issues. Non social work participants emphasized the differences of qualification and academic fields of youth development and social work, while social workers focused on the differences of training, knowledge, practicum experiences, and theories and models.

Table 13

Comparison of Qualification, Education, and Training

	Youth Development	Social Work
Qualification	Do not require licensed qualification Positive passion (Y2,Y3, S6) Day-to-day life skill teaching (Y2)	Qualification required (Y2, Y3, S6) Dealing with challenges of a person (Y2)
Academic Fields and Degrees	Psychology, sociology, education, social work, criminal, recreation (Y2,Y3,Y4, Y7)	Social work degree Social work field
Education and Training	Having a training and assistance providers on specific population (runaway, homeless youth) (Y3) On-the-job training (Y7) Not trained professionally (S3) More structured, less complex (S7) No knowledge on behaviors (S7) Looking at a specific area (S8)	Better at boundaries (S1) Formal education and training (Y7) Special training at practicum and learned in school (S3) Specialized in theories, paradigms, models (S4) Knowledge on human behaviors (S7) Looking at broader picture (S8)

Suggestion for the Promotion of Youth Development Practice

All participants were asked to make suggestions for better strengths-based youth development work. Twelve participants stated training, seven mentioned the importance of recognizing youth development field, six emphasized having attitude toward strengths-based practices. Five participants also stressed enhancing formal education, four participants suggested supportive contexts and another four suggested more research and evaluation of the programs for better youth development practice.

Suggestions for youth professionals and strengths-based practice. First, twelve participants stressed the importance of training for youth professionals. Training is the only choice that youth professionals can get specific knowledge and skills on youth development out of school education. According to David and Diane, there is no place when youth workers or licensed social workers go to get the on-going training on youth development after they are out of school. Jim suggested more opportunities for training to learn other people's experiences. Mia emphasized continuing education. Tom, Bob, and Doug also stated training youth professionals is very important for better strengths-based practice. For instance, Bob mentioned that "exposing people to that kind of research helps them get the point." Doug said, "Strengths-based practice comes out of the core philosophies of each of the agencies in terms of what you provide on a regular basis in terms of training for your staff, in terms of ongoing conversations that they do have."

People need to have a special set of skills and trainings in order to work with youth effectively. Sarah described that more training on strengths-based practice is necessary for upper level management including supervisors and executive directors. It needs to go beyond the case

managers because if their supervisor or director is not supportive, “it’s not going to happen.” Amy stated that if she had more specific training in positive youth development, she will be better able to advocate for it. “With having more training about what positive youth development is might help them to see the benefits and therefore try to be stronger advocates for things like that.”

Bob suggested having more strengths-based workshops and researching models as ways to promote the strengths-based youth practice. Tim said that social workers need to study sociology and politics “to be able to work effectively, and also to have realistic expectations about the result of our work.” Linda emphasized “having short practicum and some classes that are based in work with youth.”

> I think if social workers had an opportunity, even if it was shorter, if they got exposed during practicum to special populations and had some specific speakers coming in the class, special projects related to, that they were actually having to do paperwork and some interactions just on a gathering information basis. Maybe it’s not actual practice, but maybe they go out and they interview people and clients.

Second, seven participants stressed the necessity of recognizing the field of youth development as a profession. For instance, David emphasized the importance of the youth development field by creating tools to help all players such as the community, funders, policy-makers, front line youth workers, parents, and volunteers. “We have to have tools for them to understand what it means and then to put it into practice and then be able to identify if they are doing well or not.

> We have to take this understanding, this philosophy, this concept of youth development, and we have to put it into practice not only with front line youth

> workers, but we have to put it into practice in a very systematic way so that people who want to work with young people can go get trained in school, so that policy makers understand how positive youth development will impact the decisions they make on a public policy level so that funders can start to understand how that affects us, so that communities start to understand how positive youth development can be different rather than just throwing money or solutions at young people.

According to Diane, strengths-based practice is a really important tool for social workers to use when they're working with youth. Mia suggests looking at developing a profession around youth work. "One thing that we can work on is building a profession." A continual understanding of positive youth development and continuing education are important for youth development professional to promote the youth development practice. Rita suggested social workers see the possibilities and the promise of the future for young people rather than the problems that they have right now.

She thought that focusing on positive youth development thus moving together towards a common goal rather than trying to solve a problem will be "kind of a transition" for social workers. Sarah suggested to look for assets and to be very conscious of the strengths instead of making sure that they fit in some box. It is important that we recognize that it is harder than Pollyanna work and then support people who are doing it and encourage them, and have opportunities where they can talk about specific stories. Then it is going to a place of hope and possibility with clients instead of a place with problems and despair.

Third, six participants emphasized having attitude toward strengths-based practice. Mary stated that not assuming that we know what is best for the youth is important. She concluded that mentoring is pairing together and watching them become friends. According to Pam, social

workers need to have a sense of openness and keeping themselves humble to promote better strengths-based practice with children and youth.

> They just trained me to really understand people. You've got to really be able just to have that question in your mind. I think just having a sense of openness. Always be open no matter how many initials you get behind your name, how much money you make, how many credentialing, you've got to have a sense of openness about relating to people and being willing to say I do not know everything.

Kati described that it has changed tremendously for the good now compared to the past years of the 1980s when she was in the school of social welfare. She said that terminology like strengths-based was "not even around then." But "it was pretty complementary to what the clinical work that I was doing in the field. But what I was disheartened by was the lack of concern about.… the whole need for social justice. It's not enough." Cathy stated "don't be afraid to burn out," for the workers of a strengths-based practice, "because if you truly love what you're doing, you won't burn out."

> You have to have, you as a person, me as a person, I have to be okay with who I am, with what I am, with the way I am, to be able to make someone else feel good about themselves. And if I don't have all those components put together, what good am I going to be to them?

Fourth, five participants suggested formal education for better youth development practice. Rita said that there is not an educational course that brings people to youth development. The youth development field is a combination of running a business, supervising staff, and building a structure for long term outcomes for young participants. It can be an educational course with some melding of those combinations. Thus she suggested supports and opportunities that expose

people to a lot of different research models. She stated that it would be better if the youth development field had more structure around it and better ways to teach it and it had more of a professional reputation in order to make youth development a profession,

Doug suggested that universities need to educate and have a degree on youth development. “I think to make that change in either direction, there’s going to have to be a national change which implements itself within the schools.” And that change comes from “developing some explicit standards and some funding.” In particular, “social workers need to advocate through their university structures” he added, “Change at the educational level. I see it as so much broader and so much bigger than the one individual as opposed to the individual being an advocate.” Cathy stressed that the field of social services needs formal training. The formal education gives the basics, the ground, the footing, and the foundation. Bob suggested becoming more knowledgeable about children. “I think, if they can, continue in that field and go to school. Educate themselves about children and social welfare. Get a degree.”

Fifth, four respondents suggested supportive agency context with opportunities for training and good compensation. For example, Bob mentioned the importance of making strengths-based practice a part of mission statement in an organization. Pam pointed out the importance of “getting buy-in from people who are involved in the process” in addition to an emphasis on involving clients in what people are doing and getting their expertise. She emphasized youth presence at any training program as well. “Any time you’re working with youth and you’re trying to do positive youth development and education. You’re going to have to somehow involve the youth, however you do that whether they have a direct role or a less direct role.”

> Anything that we ever did, always had youth present. We’d go to conferences and they always had youth speakers. And they did more than just talk about their life.

> They presented on a topic, and it was a topic that they were truly an expert at, because they had either lived what they were talking about and told us how they got the help, and almost always, somewhere in the story that they told I found that they were relating about I met this person who opened a world for me. Or actually they didn't open the world to me, they were the mirror that I reflected back on where I figured out what I needed to make my life better. So just involving your clients in what you're doing and getting their expertise, because they know the stuff that some of those social workers just don't know. They bring that heart and that soul.

Sixth, four participants suggested research and evaluation for youth development professionals and social workers to promote strengths-based practice. For example, Jim suggested a better evaluation of youth programs. "There's not a lot of research and study that goes into these programs to serve kids." That is an area that is "kind of untapped" and it is necessary to "evaluate them and see how effective they really are." Tom suggested that we have to "toot our own horns a little bit about our successes." According to him, "There's talk about the successes that we have to show that we're being productive."

Rita introduced a case that some youth-serving organizations were doing research and outcome study to push youth development field forward. "They would bring youth development professionals together from all over town and have training times and conferences and talk about the field. They also worked with some local colleges to start youth development tracks of education and were working with a national model to get a youth development certification." In particular, Pam emphasized "research into how to measure" for the promotion of youth development practice.

Suggestions for social work education. Study participants were asked to make suggestions for enhancing education for youth service professionals to promote positive youth development practice. For social work education, many participants addressed curriculum, class development, emphasis on non-clinical practice, practicum, and friendly context for youth development. In particular, eight participants, including six social workers and two non-social workers, stated that direct education in coursework on youth development practice is necessary to enhance education for youth professionals. Four social work participants specifically pointed out that social work curriculum is too clinical and thus social workers have a tendency of labeling clients.

First, eight participants stated curriculum issues for better social work education to promote positive youth development practice. As Mia stated that when social work graduates work with young people, they need to understand that population and need to be open to not stereotype young people. Doug emphasized direct education in coursework in terms of practical application and internships. Cora asked for more courses regarding more child development issues in social work education, especially if social workers are going to work in a youth development or in a school setting. She said that social work education does not teach how to work with youth that have behavior problems and how to set up plans for them. Social workers learn about therapy at school, but that is not really what they need when they are in a work organization. “What they teach you in the School of Social Welfare is therapy, and that’s not really what we do when you’re in a work organization. You’re trying to help maintain the child. And they just don’t do that.”

She also suggested learning about how to teach youth social skills. She said that she had no idea what that meant until she started working in her job. “Social skill is basically teaching them

how to join a conversation or making friends or whatever it is. But that big term, I have no idea. And then you have to break down okay, how do I make friends? So that would be really helpful."

A social worker, Kati, mentioned that social work education focuses on helping people to become clinicians or private practitioners when they got out of school. However, "I always knew it wasn't for me." In order to enhance the strengths-based practice in the field, she suggested to make sure that it incorporates the strengths perspective whenever and wherever possible. According to Bob, "they only touch strengths-based. You may have a chapter in the whole class that you study in regards to strengths-based. And they cover a lot of other approaches and theories of social work." Likewise, Linda said that she learned the strengths perspective in one of the very first graduate courses she took, and it was a generic social work graduate course. "It was about all the different models." Also, the strengths perspective was not the whole thing.

Social work classes are broader to be applicable to youth. They often do not help social workers get to special problems that affect just youth and how to deal with those. Therefore, she suggested that social work education should add more actual talking about specific populations. They should start out with the broad systemic change, but they need to do a very good job of helping people think about the specific issues related to particular populations, including children and youth. In addition, without having a lot of community experience, taking that theory and putting it to the special needs of different populations is very difficult for a new social worker.

> I think they should add more actual talking about specific populations. They should start out with the broad. I think they do a good job with the broad systemic kind of change, but I don't think they do a very good job, often, of helping people think about what are the specific issues related to particular populations, whether it be youth, the elderly, the mentally ill, you know, different special kinds of issues that

> come up with those different populations. I certainly didn't feel like I got that. I went back to school late for my master's, so I had a lot of reality-based education which I could bring to the broader education and apply it, but if you're a new social worker and you're going right from your BSW to your MSW and you don't have a lot of community experience, then I think taking that theory and putting it to the special needs of different populations is very difficult.

Second, five participants stated that social work needs to have dedicated classes that help youth workers gain competencies for working with young people. David introduced an example that a youth development organization has set up certificate classes through the community college. It is possible to assume that social work can be the professional and educational context by which youth workers can learn their skills. However, he said, "that's not the case" and "I don't think they're going that way." He stated that if social workers want youth workers to be a part of them then they need to develop classes that will help them learn how to do positive youth development and implement it.

Rita mentioned the importance of teaching youth workers to be able to do youth development. "It's all about being intentional about teaching what you want people to be able to do." Sarah, a social worker, emphasized teaching the strengths perspective at all schools of social work. Linda, another social worker, thought that some schools do a good job of talking about the strengths perspective. But not all schools do that. Her understanding is that most schools of social work do not have any specialized classes that deal with youth development. "It's a lot of broader, which those skills are really applicable to youth, but I think that they often don't help social workers get to special problems that affect just youth and how to deal with those."

Thus she suggested having the availability of classes that are expressly about the strengths perspective, but not just about that, but also about the community interaction, which is really important for social work education.

> I think that at KU they have quite a focus on the strengths perspective. Other schools don't necessarily have that kind of focus. For example, in my education there wasn't really class about the strengths perspective. So I think having the availability of classes that are expressly about the strengths perspective, but not just about that, but also about, I think the community interaction piece is really important and if some way there could be a specific practicum, actually, that involved community collaborative efforts rather than just focusing on being at one agency.

Third, four social work participants stated that social work curricula focus on clinical aspects. For example, Cathy pointed out that the social work curriculum is too clinical. "They forget to tell them that you have to be a person." She thinks social work is an emotionally challenging position and "you have to be strong enough to do that, and you have to be willing to give a part of yourself every day." Her suggestion to social work education is "don't be so clinical, because not everybody fits in a box." According to her, although clinical social workers are needed, "don't be like an antiseptic." If we are sitting in a counseling session, we need to look into eyes to see who they are. "When you're talking with someone and you're listening to them, don't just look at that piece of paper. That person has a set of eyes. Look in their eyes. Look and see what's there. Don't just judge them by what they're telling you, because you don't always see the whole picture that way. You have to look into a soul."

Linda also said that social work education is focusing more on the clinical aspects and there is very little focus on community issues. "They were more interested in the individual or the

clinical focus. I think somehow that's been romanticized in the eyes of social workers. Like somehow it's going to be a better money and more position for me if I'm a clinical social work and I work in a therapeutic setting."

> Because I think we've gotten more into the clinical aspect during practicum, or the administrative aspect, but yet a lot of people really don't understand how community collaboration works, what kind of community collaboratives exist. Some kind of community collaboration class or practicum. I thought that the class that I had on the community assessment was very good, and I really enjoyed that.
>
> It doesn't seem to be, people don't feel like community work, somehow they feel like that's the grunt work, so to speak. That might be where I have to get my feet we in social work, but I don't want to stay there. Really, that's the truth. So somehow if in graduate school there could be a way to reverse that. I don't know how that is, but some kind of a focus, not just on an individual practicum, but some kind of a community-based. Maybe it's a whole class. Maybe it's not even a practicum. Maybe it's a class that really goes about doing community collaborative effort and doing a community assessment.

Fourth, four participants emphasized practicum opportunity that is based on youth work for better social work education. Although we can teach people in social work about how to do youth development, Diane states, "That's going to be the best way for them to really experience it." Doug also stated that practicum or experiences with direct practice during school education is necessary and helpful. "I don't know what it is to become a bachelor's of social work and what kind of actual practice that they have connecting youth development to the social work program." However "I've had some people who have come out of their master's program in

social work that have never practiced counseling" Doug mentioned practical application or internships. "It goes to bridging theory with direct practice and for people who can never make that bridge. I don't think they're able to connect with the actual individual ever."

Youth development organization is a practicum site that social workers can practice. Bob stressed the need to recruit students who want to know more about the strengths-based approach and "getting it out into the practicum sites." Linda also mentioned that there are not many chances to get a practicum in a youth organization and most times "it would be a child welfare agency." She said that if there could be a specific practicum that involved community collaborative efforts rather than just focusing on being at one agency, that is also important for the profession. She added that it might be helpful if social workers got exposed during practicum to special populations and had some specific speakers coming in the class.

Fifth, five participants described a need for the social work profession to more focus on positive youth development. Social work is getting left behind in the endeavor of having emphasis on youth development work. David pointed out the fact that current funding trends and educational connections for youth workers are not happening in social work but happening in education. The beginnings of youth work educational program are connected to schools of education instead of schools of social work. And some of that is driven by the fact that current model for funding are after-school programs and thus that money comes through the Department of Education. Therefore, schools of social work need to decide to have conversations with the youth work field to "say how do we create a context that's more friendly" to them, because right now "there isn't that context."

The strengths-based practice comes with time. According to Linda, if we do not have somebody who is encouraging the strengths-based practice as young social workers develop it,

then it makes harder to practice. According to Tim, it is important to include client strengths. If we do not include them we will be missing a large part of the picture for positive youth development. We will not be able to develop realistic goals and objectives. However, he emphasized a comprehensive analysis of what is going on, including strengths and weaknesses.

Summary

The main research question of the study is "how do youth professionals trained in the strengths perspective in youth-serving organizations or child welfare agencies practice positive youth development as it relates to a strengths perspective?" First of all, youth development was described as a developmental growth process, a positive perspective with emphasis on strengths and assets, a programmatic framework of giving opportunity and chance to develop skills, and building relationships and providing resources for children and youth. The strengths perspective was identified as strengths-focused, client-driven, connectedness-centered, and solution-focused. The similarities of youth development and the strengths perspective were explained into three themes: looking for strengths, having positive traits, and recognizing the meaning of "they are the expert" phrase.

The analysis revealed that the practice principles were organized around several primary principles. Strengths and skills of the children and youth and the importance of family were emphasized. The working relationship between young people and professionals was characterized by love, respect, and trust, active listening and learning, and professional boundaries. Youth participation including engagement and empowerment, self-awareness, safety were also described as a guiding principle. Other guiding principles provided by the participants include faith, agency mission, and non-judgmental attitude.

Several themes of honesty, mutual respect, trust, active listening, being supportive, good role model, being genuine, and having a shared relationship emerged as being attributes of an effective youth-adult relationship. Confidentiality, touching issues, self-revelation, reporting, religious work, electronic contacts, personal gains, and intimate relationship issue were mentioned as examples of ethical issues to maintain good boundaries.

Study participants pointed out the benefits they see young people gaining from engaging in strengths-based youth development. Youth professionals experienced benefits of learning, providing better environment and getting program direction in their practice. Many participants identified a youth-centered mindset, characteristics of programs, having a supportive mentor, youth participation, faith and spiritual belief as significant supporting factors. On the contrary, limited resources, youth program characteristics that are whimsical in nature, getting people to buy into youth development philosophy, multiplicity of client factors were described as challenging factors. Eight themes emerged from the participants' responses including agency mission, executive director, staff and department sharing the same philosophy, training and education size and rules, funding, and politics and cooperation among agencies.

Half of the participants said that youth development work is a part of social work. The following were offered as similarities between social work and youth development work: human services and a helping job, same roles of professionals with similar skills, and having the same level of empathy and compassion for humans. Participants mentioned the following as suggestions for better strengths-based practice: training, recognizing the youth development field, having an attitude toward strengths-based practices, enhancing formal education, and more research and evaluation of the programs. In addition, direct education in coursework on youth development practice as well as curriculum change, practicum with youth-serving organization,

emphasis on non-clinical practice, and friendly context for youth development in social work profession were recommended for better social work education.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of positive youth development practice as it relates to a strengths perspective and its implications for enhancing social work practice with children and youth. Youth professionals' understanding of the meaning of positive youth development, their perspectives on nature of youth-professional relationships, and their perception of benefits and challenges of implementing strengths-based practice were analyzed based on open-ended interviews with eighteen research participants in a metropolitan area of USA. As identified in the literature reviews and findings of the study, the field of social work with children and youth is moving beyond treatment and problem prevention practice toward strengths-based youth development practice.

In this final chapter, the study provides a new direction of youth promotion practice for better social work with adolescents as a convergence of a strengths perspective and youth development principles based on the literature review and study findings. This qualitative study explored the "black box" of youth development work, allowing for an enhanced understanding of the nature of youth development field as an emerging professional practice with ties to social work or related disciplines. The implications for social work practice, education, research, and policy, including participants' and the researcher's recommendations are also the focus of this chapter.

Convergence of a Strengths Perspective and Youth Development: Toward Youth Promotion

Converging Characteristics of Youth Promotion Practice

The first three chapters developed a supportive discussion on the converging characteristics of strengths-based practices of the strengths perspective and positive youth development as

sharing core elements that counters traditional deficit-based perspectives. Based on the historical and contemporary contexts of the problem-focused perspectives on youth, a critique with emphasis of the evolution of a strengths perspective and positive youth development principle is developed. The recent attention on strengths and resilience of young people has influenced the increasingly strong need for a convergence of a strengths perspective and youth development principles as an arena for social work practice with adolescents (Bernard, 1997; Delgado, 2002).

For example, Watkins and Iverson (1998) stress that as a result of a changing social environment that systematically undervalues youth's assets, social work needs to redouble its efforts to focus on the identification and utilization of youths' strengths. According to Rapp et al. (2005), "In youth services, positive youth development and resiliency approaches offer a significant alternative to traditional approaches" (p. 83). As already addressed in the introduction section of the study, interest in the development and application of the strengths perspective and positive youth development principles has been increased in social work and other related professions. In addition, several similarities and differences between these two perspectives are examined as well.

This understanding is supported by the study findings. All eighteen study participants explained that the strengths perspective and youth development are applied in the fields of working with youth in a variety of settings. For some participants, positive youth development is understood as a subset of the strengths perspective. All study participants remembered their first encounter with the term positive youth development and the strengths perspective. Six professionals with no social work education and three social workers described that they began to know those terms through their work at youth development organization or child welfare

agencies. Seven youth workers learned through training or workshop programs. Four social workers stated that they studied the strengths-based practice through university education.

Many participants identified similarities between youth development practice and the strengths perspective. Nine study participants described that both practices are looking for strengths that young clients already have. Eight emphasized that both practices are building upon the positive traits that individuals might have and move forward from it. Four participants recognized the phrase, “they are the expert.” Young people have to be involved in solving their own problems and make decisions on their own behalf. Also, fourteen participants described the differences between the strengths perspective and youth development work. Youth development practice is related to the youth specific population, environmental contexts, building skills and assets, and community development and resilience factors, whereas the strengths perspective becomes specific when using assessment tools and is applied to the broader population.

Based on participants’ understanding of the similarities and differences of the strengths perspective and youth development, the following diagram in Figure 1 illustrates the emerging convergence of a strengths perspective and youth development practice as it represents the realm of numbered sections (①+②+③). The diagram also shows the realm of youth promotion practice as a converging core practice of the two perspectives in the field of social work with young people (④).

First, the strengths perspective is implemented throughout social work practice with youth (Figure 1, section ①). This includes mental health, substance abuse prevention, child welfare, and juvenile justice, to name but a few (Oko, 2006). Second, youth development practice has been applied to the field of social work with adolescents (Figure 1, section ②). Historically, youth development reflects the settlement house and group work model (Malekoff, 2004).

Recently from a social work perspective, Delgado (2002) utilizes a youth development paradigm and applies it to urban youth and raises points of consideration when youth development principles conflict with cultural values. Third, the strengths perspective is applied in the youth development field (Figure 1, section ③). For example, resilience research offers strong support for the possibility of successful application of the strengths perspective to youth development practice (Pittman et al., 2003).

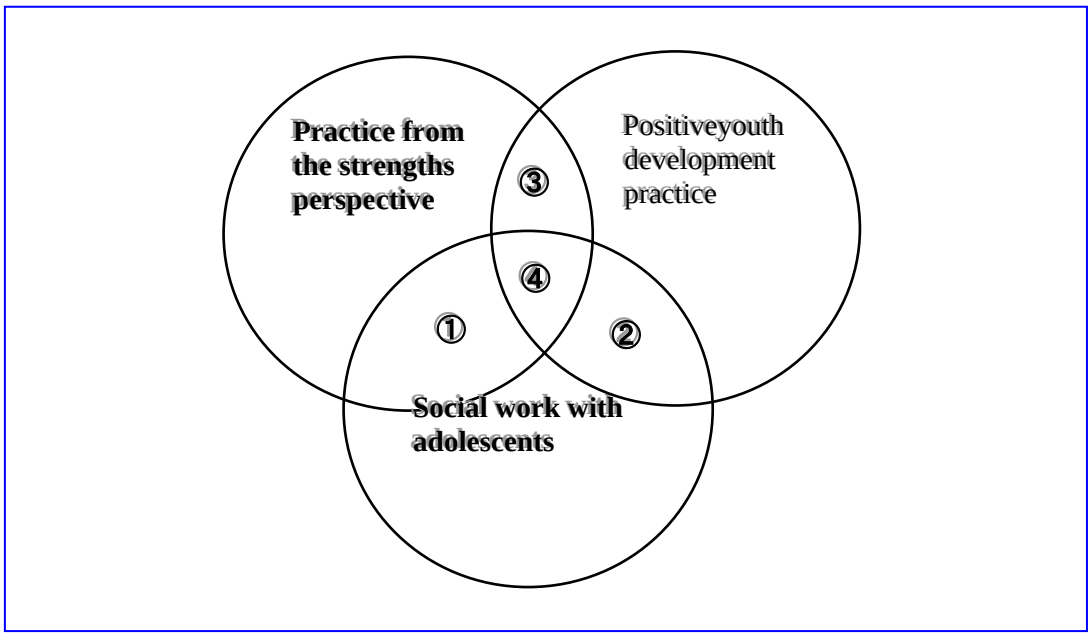

Figure 1. Youth Promotion: Converging Practice of the Strengths Perspective and Positive Youth Development

When taken together, all the development and application of the strengths perspective and youth development principles serve as a guiding practice toward "youth promotion" as a convergence of two perspectives in social work practice (Figure 1, section ④). Commonalities of the two perspectives are expected to support the strengths of each perspective in synergistic ways. The differences are also expected to supplement the weakness of each perspective in the establishment of "youth promotion" practice.

The Necessity and Importance of a Convergence of the Strengths-based Practices

Convergence of the strengths perspective and positive youth development in social work with young people is necessary and important in terms of each perspective's strengths and weaknesses. The strengths perspective's weaknesses can be supplemented by the youth development's strengths and vice versa. In addition, each of these concepts also overlaps with the other, and when combined they promote positive outcomes and create clear benefits for society in general and for adolescents in particular.

First, convergence contributes to the expansion of the scope and realm of social work with adolescents. Strengths perspective has been applied in case management and thus evolved around the relationship between clients and professional helpers (Arnold, Walsh, Oldham, & Rapp, 2007). An example is a study that points to the effectiveness of strengths-based practice for case management with people suffering from serious emotional disturbances (Rapp, 1998). However, youth development is especially popular with group activity situations, such as after-school programs or in the activities of youth-serving organizations (Youngblade & Theokas, 2006). Therefore, by converging the two perspectives into youth promotion practice, social work within the field of youth expands its practice beyond case management to group work as well as beyond welfare agency to youth-serving organization.

Second, convergence of the two perspectives expands social work practice to more young populations. The strengths perspective targets youth who are in need of help, youth development fosters all youths, regardless of life circumstances. In fact, the strengths model was originally limited to work with people with severe and persistent mental health illness, however it has spread to work with emotionally disturbed youth and their families, people with substance abuse problems, and the elderly in long-term care (Rapp, 1998). The youth development field targets

most young people in general and specific types of youths in particular. This includes "youths in prison and juvenile justice settings; youths in transition to independent living; youth who are disconnected from society and its key institutions" (Delgado, 2002, p. 138).

Third, convergence is also important to reduce the weaknesses of the two perspectives, the strengths perspective and positive youth development. There is criticism of the strengths perspective for underplaying the constraints and the often-overwhelming struggles that poor and oppressed people face in their every day lives (Finn & Jacobson, 2003; Margolin, 1997). Also, youth development is criticized for overlooking the fact that youth face risks that can jeopardize their health and development if not addressed. According to Small and Memmo (2004), "although the likelihood of a problem behavior steadily decreases as the number of assets an individual possesses increase, the presence of even one risk factor can double or triple the occurrence of a problem behavior, even among youth who report many assets" (p. 6).

Fourth, efforts of convergence are also significant to embracing youth development principles in the social work field more than ever. Although strong needs and interests in positive youth development programs exist, this has not generally been easily applied in the public child welfare system (Collins, 2001). However, youth development, as an ecological framework that promotes positive growth and development of young people, is vital for relevant social work practice in the 21st century. This approach is critical, given that an examination of social work practice literature has suggested that social worker's methodology still predominantly maintains a clinical treatment focus (Morrison et al., 1997). More needs to be done to interest social workers in youth development strategies that emphasize asset-building and build youth capacity through relationships, as well as foster skill development and interconnectedness with the youth's environment (Amodeo & Collins, 2007; Crowe, 2007; Delgado, 2002).

Fifth, convergence of the strengths-based practices is more important for youth in need, or special care, although converging youth promotion practice applies to all young people. Like all other young people, youth in care require normalized developmental experiences in order to prepare for successful adulthood. For example, young people in out-of-home care have the same concerns, hopes, and dreams as their more mainstream counterparts (Nixon, 1997). However, many youth in care simply are not provided opportunities to participate in the types of activities that might help them develop the internal and external life skills that come through participation in various youth development activities. Despite these circumstances, the youth promotion practice affirms youth as experts in their own lives and as leaders towards improving the care system (Chalmers, 2000; Crowe, 2007).

The necessity and importance of a convergence of the strengths-based practices are further supported by the study findings. As already presented in previous chapter of findings, fourteen participants identified social work's contribution and usefulness to the strengths-based youth development practice. Similarities and differences between youth development and social work practice were also analyzed by eighteen study participants.

Many participants stated that youth development work is a distinct profession or can be a profession, while some participants understood that the field is not seen as a valid profession. Among them, nine participants including four youth workers with no social work education and five professionals with social work degrees said that social work overlaps with a lot of things in youth work field and that youth development work is a part of social work. Many participants understood similarities between social work and youth development work in terms of both are human services and helping job, same roles of professionals with similar skills, and having the same level of empathy and compassion for humans.

It is also important to note that there were no differences between social worker participants and non social worker professionals in their understanding of the similarities between youth development field and social work practice. Although many participants perceived the similarities between the youth work field and social work practice, differences between the two fields are also identified by eighteen youth professional participants. The differences are discussed by population, main focus of the practice, problem involvement, approaches and activities, qualification, academic fields and degrees, and education and training.

As discussed, a convergence of youth development and the strengths perspective is necessary and important in order to strengthen the commonalities between youth development and strengths perspective. It is also significant to recognize the similarities and differences between the field of youth development and social work practice to provide better youth work toward the establishment of youth promotion practice. The benefits of this converging practice can be inferred from the study findings.

The majority of study respondents indicated that youth professionals experienced many "positives," such as a sense that their clients were "empowered" by showing a higher level of involvement in their own plans. Self-determination, being a positive contributor, better outcomes, and relationship facilitation are also mentioned as beneficial aspects of the strengths-based youth development practice to young people. In addition, learning, providing a better environment, and giving program direction are stated as benefits of a strengths-based practice to youth professionals.

A Conceptual Model of Youth Promotion

Defining Youth Promotion Practice

The conceptualization of "youth promotion" was developed in this study as a synthesis of insights on strengths-based youth development practices derived from literature on positive youth development and the strengths perspective as well as exemplary practices and recommendations from interviewees. The term, "promotion" is well addressed both in the literature of the youth development field and in the statements of the study participants. The utilization of the term, "promotion" for youth promotion is also inferred from related fields of social work and social services.

For example, in the literature on youth, the term "promotion" refers to "efforts [that are] specifically designed to bring about clearly defined positive outcomes, or designed to foster the development of skills and competencies in young people" (Halper, Cusack, Raley, O'Brien, & Wills, 1995, p.1). Promotion by this definition accepts the premise that youth have innate strengths and resources that need to be enhanced rather than developed. Promotion emphasizes use of strengths to build on opportunities and supports that foster the abilities that young people possess (Delgado, 2002). In the words of Benson (2007), "There are several aligned areas of inquiry that are beginning to build what we might call a 'science of promoting developmental strengths,' in contrast to what has become known as the field of prevention science" (p. 48). Some of the conceptual strands include resilience, protective factors, developmental assets, and youth development.

Five participants used the word, "promotion" when they explained their strengths-based practices and made suggestions for youth development professionals. For example, Pam, a social work participant, stated that "thinking of the ways they [i.e. youth professionals or staff] promote … they do some very hands-on kinds of advocacy … They'll support their clients just even in helping them." In the context of making suggestions to enhance strengths-based practices, Pam

described that “Educating stakeholders in the community is a way the youth development practitioners can promote the youth development practice … We’d go to conferences and they always had youth speakers. And they did more than just talk about their life.” A non social work participant, Diane also mentioned promotion as meaning “to advance or to advocate.” When the researcher asked the question, “How can social workers better advocate for positive youth development?” She raised a question saying, “advance it?” and continued to ask, “promoting the youth development practices?” A social worker, Bob, mentioned family promotion and said that “when I think of that [family promotion] I think of awareness.” He explained, “Not just a one-time deal. I think periodically through a kid’s life being involved in what they do. Advocate for some of the things that they want.” He added that “finding ways to get their ideas out there. Because I think youth have very good ideas …They need support from adults on how to put those actions into place.”

In fact, the term, “promotion” is utilized throughout the social welfare field and other helping professions. For example, family promotion in the family support field emphasizes family strengths, informal support and resources (Dunst, Trivette, & Deal, 1988). Mason (2003) notes, “neither correction nor prevention, family support is a promotion approach that emphasizes positive targets as the goal of intervention” (p. 509). The health promotion perspective stresses capacities rather than deficits. Health promotion is a multidisciplinary concept that is on a continuum ranging from disease prevention to optimal health and that emphasizes physical capabilities and social and personal resources. According to Delgado and Zhao (2008), it includes the concept of “capacity building” as a central tenet, as well as participation. They defined health promotion as “a social intervention focused on improving the

health (cognitive, physical, emotional, spiritual, and moral) of a community through provision of requisite tools to help them make informed decisions pertaining to their well-being" (p. 15).

Thus, as a converging practice, youth promotion can be defined as a process of enhancing youth strengths and resources to promote positive outcomes and help young people by contact with healthy and productive adults. This understanding is differentiated from the terms of prevention and resilience. Prevention refers to "reductions or elimination of outcomes that are harmful to young people and to society" (Halper et al., 1995, p.1). The term resilience is used to describe "successful adaptation, growth, and development despite exposure to severe stress and adversity" (Bernard, 1997, p. 13). Much of the attention paid to resilience comes out of the work undertaken by prevention programs and "a focus on resiliency allows youth to celebrate their talents and what they bring to programs" (Delgado, 2002, p. 75). The field of prevention has embraced the constructs of resilience, grounded in ecological and developmental framework, and this in turn has informed the youth development perspective (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2002; Perkins & Villarruel, 2000).

The prevention field has made significant development in the last two decades. However, prevention efforts have largely focused on at-risk youth. Prevention programs have generally been categorically funded to address specific social problems. Prevention practice is also criticized as it still focuses on what is wrong with young people rather than what is right. The lessons learned from years of funding prevention initiatives have emphasized the importance of broadening this perspective to more promotion-based approaches. Murphy (1995) indicates that a prevention model of programming "aims to reduce the incidence of problem behaviors. The limitation of prevention, however, is that it narrows the perspective about what youth can accomplish and what youth need to achieve positive outcomes" (p. 10).

Although these efforts have enjoyed some success in reducing risks and health-compromising behaviors, their achievement is constrained by the limited evidence of sustained behavior change after the program has ended (Leffert et al., 1998). Thus, many critiques of the problem-focused prevention perspectives have been developed and more attention began to be paid to the strengths- and promotion-based approaches such as the strengths perspective in social work, youth development, positive psychology, family promotion, and health promotion.

As a converging practice of the strengths perspective and youth development, youth promotion combines the common elements of their primary focus on strengths and competencies rather than deficits, their emphasis on resources and environments, and their expectation on positive outcomes. However as a synergistic way of convergence, youth promotion can be defined as having a synthesis of goals, targets, assumptions, strategies, emphasis, and actors of the two perspectives. The accompanying chart (Table 14) captures some of the salient accents on the definition of youth promotion compared to strengths perspective and youth development as it applies to social work with adolescents.

Youth promotion practice represents strengths-focused social work with adolescents that is utilized from the convergence of a strengths perspective and youth development practice. Promotion of existing strengths and resources in individuals, families, and the community is a core element of the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 2005). Promoting the positive developmental processes that are known to advance health and well-being of young people is the key goal of youth development (Benson & Saito, 2001).

Promotion of strengths and positive development is fundamentally different than “fixing problems” or “preventing problems.” Although society has focused historically on fixing and preventing youth problems, youth promotion practice aims to promote strengths to sustain

healthy adolescents and to increase capacities to overcome adversities (Maton et al, 2004). The guiding belief of youth promotion is that young individuals and society both will benefit greatly if strengths-based social work is emphasized instead of the prevailing deficiency-based problem focused practices.

Table 14

Synthesis of the Youth Promotion Practice

	Youth Promotion	Strengths Perspective on Youth	Youth Development
Goal	Promote or enhance Strengths, Relationship, and Participation	Promote belonging, healing, relationship building	Promote or enhance developmental assets
Target	Client individual first, All youth later	Client individuals	All children and adolescents
Assumption	Youth as resources to be promoted	Problem does not solve the problem	Youth as resource to be developed
Strategies	Expansion of social services. Ecological perspective Vision for positive development	Expansion of social services Targeted at high risk behaviors Person-environment	Mobilization of all citizens and socializing systems to act on a shared vision for positive human development
Emphasis	Developing positive outcomes, not just alleviating problem	Client hope, value, and desired goals	Internal Assets External Assets
The Actors	Client takes the lead, professional and adult support	Client takes the lead Professionals support	Citizens take the lead Professionals support

One example of youth promotion practice as it applies to youth in special care can be found in one social welfare agency. Growing Home (formerly Human Service Associates) applies a strengths perspective and positive youth development principles into their practices with youth in therapeutic foster care. Since therapeutic foster care is based on a medical model, its referral

sources are very much rooted in a deficit perspective. Adolescents are referred to them for help in fixing their negative or destructive behaviors.

In spite of this situation, Growing Home recognized that professionals working in direct practice with youth in care must begin taking strengths-based approaches to their work. Chalmers (2000) describes that "some of this recognition has been generated by the fact that it is becoming ever clearer that many of the methods and approaches traditionally used in foster care have not resulted in positive outcomes for youth once they leave care" (p. 24). Growing Home searched for a holistic, strength-based model for practice to help demonstrate their mission, their understanding of the perspectives of youth in care, and the ways young people say they wish to be treated during their care experience. Their search resulted in the agency embracing a model which combines established principles of youth development, attachment, and positive parenting values and skills. Growing Home staff and care providers believe that changed lives come from seeing and experiencing what is possible. Change seems possible when they focus on realizing their potential.

Practice Principles of Youth Promotion

Practice principles should play an influential role in carrying forth the perspectives into the field. As discussed earlier chapter, youth promotion principle is well inferred from Saleebey's (1997) principles of the strengths perspective. Malekoff's (2004) seven-principle framework for "strengths-based group work with children and adolescents" also needs to be stressed as well as Degado's (2000) fourteen strengths principles for effective youth programming in youth development.

Recently, Rapp et al. (2005) identify the six hallmarks of strengths-based practice: (1) it is goal oriented; (2) it systematically assesses strengths; (3) the environment is seen as rich in

resources; (4) explicit methods are used for using client and environmental strengths for goal attainment; (5) the relationship is hope-inducing; and (6) the provision of meaningful choices is central and clients have the authority to choose (pp. 81-82). Each of these principles serves to guide each element of the youth promotion approach.

It is not possible to practice youth development without a set of principles, although they may be either explicitly or implicitly stated. Many of the more common youth development principles are in many ways not unique to youth development practice (Delgado, 2002). In a recent study, Amodeo and Collins (2007) present seven practice guidelines for welfare agency staff using a positive youth development approach to address youth substance abuse: (1) talk with every youth about alcohol and other drug use as a routine part of your work; (2) engage youth in self-assessment by stimulating self-reflection and generating criteria youth can use in deciding for themselves whether they would like to make a change; (3) raise awareness of the effects of alcohol and other drugs on the transition process from adolescence to adulthood; (4) explain the role of risk and protective factors as possible hidden dimensions affecting the youth's progress toward independence; (5) focus on periods when the problem behavior was absent or decreased significantly, when the youth used more positive coping methods; (6) assist youth in developing strong linkages with community institutions that can help youth be full partners in the life of the community; and (7) engage youth in identifying their stage of readiness for changing substance use-related behavior (pp. 79-82).

The analysis of the study participants' interview data revealed that the practice principles were organized around several primary principles. First, strengths and skills of the children and youth and the importance of family as an important resource for youth development were emphasized throughout the interviews. Second, the working relationship between young people

and professionals was an essential component of the working process, and it was characterized by love, respect, trust, active listening and learning, and professional boundaries. Third, youth professionals wanted to make youth feel participated, engaged, and empowered. Other principles provided by the participants include self-awareness, safety, faith, mission, and non judgmental attitude.

All of these examples of principles are ideal hypothetical qualities of programs that both meet the needs of developing adolescents and attempt to promote strengths rather than correct deficiencies. These are intended to convey the elements of a promising youth development program in a variety setting of social work with adolescents. These set of principles can apply to youth promotion practice with minor modifications.

Key Principles or Themes of the Youth Promotion Practice

As a term, youth promotion has conceptualized core influences on the framework of strengths-based social work practices with young people. This promotion-based practice emphasizes three key principles or themes: strengths promotion, relationship promotion, and participation promotion.

First, strengths promotion is the most critical principle and theme of youth promotion practice. The basis for improving quality of life rests on developing youth strengths, but in order to build strength, one must start with existing strengths. All people can be viewed as having strengths. Existing strengths can be valued, tapped, and enhanced and also new strengths can be acquired and developed. For example, the strengths promotion principle is well inferred from the strengths perspective and youth development principles.

For instance, the strengths perspective argues that, to be true to the values of the profession, we need to begin our work by recognizing people's capacities and the potential of their

circumstances (Weick, Kreider, & Chamberlain, 2005). It calls for a shift from problem- to solution-focused processes that stem from the "client's values, hopes, and desired goals" (Saleebey, 1997, p. 35). Youth development principles also offer a shift in perspective “away from a focus on correcting ‘deficits’ in individual youth toward enhancing the potential for healthy youth development in all youth in the community” (Barton, Watkins, & Jarjoura, 1997, p. 484). Social workers are encouraged to explore the resource potential of their environments and to appreciate the human capacity for resilience and creativity in the face of adversity (Finn, 2003).

Although youth promotion practice begins with existing strengths and promotes asset building, it is important to note that the presence of strengths, assets or negative factors in the lives of youth do not guarantee success or failure. According to the Search Institute (1998), this point is described as follows: (1) assets are not a panacea; (2) circumstances do not dictate destiny; (3) a lack of assets does not guarantee a doomed future; and (4) engagement in risky behaviors does not automatically result in a doomed future. Thus, strengths or assets do not guarantee success, while increasing the likelihood of success.

The strengths promotion is also supported by the findings of the study. Study participants were asked to explain their understanding of the strengths perspective and the definition of the positive youth development practice. Most youth professionals identified the strengths perspective as a strengths-focused, client-driven, relationship and connectedness-centered, and solution-focused practice. Also, the meaning of positive youth development were described as developmental process of growth, positive perspective with emphasis on strengths and assets, programmatic framework of giving opportunity and chance to develop skills, and building relationship and connectedness between youth and adult or youth professionals.

Second, relationships are at the heart of youth promotion practice. Throughout the development of both the strengths perspective and youth development work, the importance of interpersonal relationships in the helping effort has been a constant theme. In the field of youth development, the relationships between young participants and adult youth workers have been shown to be an important protective factor for positive youth development. For the strengths perspective, "clients are engaged as partner; clients least able to function as partners will need an active helper who can structure growth experiences, ensure reasonable goals, and minimize barriers" (Amodeo & Collins, 2007, p. 77).

Relationship promotion is related to the acceptance of young people as independent human beings. From this understanding, youth need to be seen as competent and having potential. Saleebey's (1996) advice for social workers utilizing a strengths perspective is also applicable for this relationship principle of youth promotion practice. He emphasizes, "They must engage individuals as equals. They must be willing to meet them eye to eye and to engage in dialogue and a mutual sharing of knowledge, tools, concerns, aspirations, and respect. The process of coming to know is a mutual and collaborative one" (p. 303). The positive youth development approach also offers an alternative to the social ageism that can limit the opportunities available to youth. Thus promotion practice emphasizes relationship promotion and this requires an atmosphere that accepts and celebrates all youth, regardless of their challenges and life circumstances.

In this study, all participants stated several roles of youth professionals including opportunity giver, active listener, relationship and skill developer, friend-like mentor, being a role model, a facilitator and a resource, and being a supporter or advocate for the youth. As for the effective youth-adult relationships, study participants acknowledged the importance of

healthy relationships between themselves and the youth. Effective youth-adult relationships are stated to be essential to having a meaningful and positive influence upon the youth with whom they work. Honesty, mutual respect and trust, having a shared relationship, active listening, being supportive, keeping professional boundaries, and genuineness were addressed as being primary attributes of an effective youth-adult relationship.

Regarding relationship promotion principle, it is significant to pay attention to the professional boundaries and ethical issues as identified in the study findings. Ten participants mentioned the importance of professional boundaries in their statements. Professional boundaries were defined as societal boundaries that "have to do with how close we can be with a young person" and "not taking advantage of the situation that you're in." Methods for appropriate ethical behaviors have been addressed in order to ensure the protection of the youth-adult professional relationship. Confidentiality, touching, self-revelation, reporting, religious work, electronic contacts, personal gains, and intimate relationship were mentioned as examples of ethical issues to maintain good boundaries.

Third, strengths and relationship promotion need to be enhanced by participation promotion, which represents meaningful involvement and engagement of young people in their own lives. Children and adolescents must be regarded as human beings in a particular developmental stage, and citizens as subject to legitimate rights, who should participate in decisions about their lives, their communities and society in general (James & McGillicuddy; 2001). The term participation is often used in the field of human services. Participation, which can be defined in many different ways, is well described as "a process of involving young people in decisions that affect their lives" (Checkoway, 1998, p. 767). Such a definition provides programs with a tremendous amount of latitude as to how participation is to be operationalized.

According to Konopka (1976), “it is quite clear that creation of conditions that facilitate healthy (youth) development begins with the encouragement of equal and responsible participation by youth in the family or other societal units.” (p.12).

Promotion-based approaches recognize the importance of involving those who receive services in important roles. Maton and his colleague (2004) note that “the active engagement of representatives of the targeted populations in making decisions and creating solutions is critical for success” (p 350). Chalmers (2000) stated that strengths-focused youth development practice can be loosely paraphrased as “youth have voices. Youth, families, communities and agencies are better when youth are supported to actively use their voices” (p.25). Pittman (1996) has pointed out that “development requires engagement. It is fostered through relationships, influenced by environments, and triggered by participation” (p.6). The participation theme points to the interface between person and environment: conditions for healthy youth development- the enhancement of a youth’s sense of belonging, competency, power, and usefulness (Watkins & Iverson, 1998).

The literature has a multitude of frameworks that can guide practitioners in conceptualizing participation. It is best viewed as a continuum: at one end there is no participation, followed by minimal participation, or tokenism; at the other end is power to make decisions and control outcomes (Arnstein, 1969; Burke, 1979; Checkoway, 1998; Sonenshein, 1998). Working from a strengths perspective, the social worker seeks to identify, facilitate, or create context in which people who have been silenced and isolated gain an understanding of, a voice in, and influence over the decisions that affect their lives (Finn & Jacobson, 2003).

Five study participants emphasized youth participation as one of their guiding practice principles of strengths-based practice including engagement and empowerment. Four participants

also pointed out the importance of youth participation as a supporting factor for youth development practice. Eight participants acknowledged the empowering benefit of the youth development practice. Active listening ranked as an important principle of youth development principle. Seven participants addressed active listening and learning as an important role of youth professionals. Six participants emphasized active listening as an attribute of effective youth-adult relationship. These study findings support the importance of youth-centered strengths-based practice with emphasis on youth participation including engagement and active listening to youth and learning from young people.

These goals of promotion practice can be better achieved by infusing principles of the strengths perspective and positive youth development principle into social work field and this again contributes to the promotion of youth to a healthy and successful adolescence. Thus, belief in youth strengths, acceptance of the positive value of young people, and facilitation of trustful relationship through participation promotion need to be emphasized as basic principles or key themes of the youth promotion practice.

Implications for Social Work

This study investigated the nature of the strengths-based youth development practice in order to draw insight about better practice for children and youth in social work as well as other related fields of practice. As discussed earlier, the development and application of youth development and the strengths perspective are identified in the study. Therefore, social work can be shifted toward a practice of youth promotion by converging the two frameworks of a strengths perspective and positive youth development. Several implications can be inferred from the development and application of youth promotion practice for better social work with children and youth.

Implication for Social Work Practice

Above all, the long-standing dominance of discourse on problems and pathologies of children and youth can be further challenged and changed. Youth promotion practices are expected to bring into the vision and the vocabulary of social work a compendium of human qualities that are the building blocks of human change. The strengths perspective and youth development approaches clearly focus on human capacity, assets, and aspirations, rather than on deficits and failure.

Second, young people are valued as human beings with strengths and resources more than ever in social work practice since the strengths perspective and youth development perspective share important assumptions about young people's possibility of strengths enhancement. The two perspectives honor people's capacity to grow more fully into the individuals they were meant to be. Both strengths-based approaches celebrate the rich personal resources that people have developed in their lives, often through great hardship. Both perspectives also recognize the essential role of hope in imaging a life beyond the problem.

Third, more youth can benefit from the youth promotion practice. The strengths perspective can expand its target to more young people beyond certain targeted groups, and youth development can extend its service to more specific population rather than to all youth. Thus youth promotion has wider appeal than treatment and/or prevention approaches, which focus primarily on groups or individuals at risk for specific problems and typically ignore the developmental needs of youth.

Fourth, as a philosophical and practical approach for young people as it means "more than school, and more than youth activities," as a principle, youth participation can be encouraged in pertinent social work practice with adolescents. Youth promotion practice recognizes the

importance of involving young participants. The active engagement of the targeted young populations in making decisions and creating solutions is critical for success. This involvement is particularly important in ensuring that the perspective of a culturally diverse population is represented in the theory building and practice of social work with young people (Maton et al., 2004).

Fifth, the social worker's role is expanded beyond interpersonal interventions with young people. Social workers need to explore and advocate for the quality supports that a youth-centered community can offer its young people. The holistic perspective inherent in youth development lends itself well to work with marginalized youth, their families, peers, and community (Hernadez, Siles, and Rochin, 2000). Positive youth outcomes are more greatly achieved when a caring community provides safe places to go, access to structured activities, opportunities to learn, and adequate access to health care, and also engages youths in decision-making (Greenwald et al., 2006).

Sixth, despite these advantages, since youth development principles have been incorporated into youth promotion practice, social workers who work with troubled children and youth tend to experience more challenges than others. For example, social workers in specific agencies have to learn to walk in two worlds. As noted earlier, experiences of Growing Home illustrates well enough how the challenges happen to young participants, staff, and the agencies. As Chalmers (2000) describes, staff need to spend at least as much time taking about capacity, contributions and connections as they do taking about problems, deficits and negative behaviors (p. 27). Agencies providing foster care need to become more deliberate in utilizing the strengths perspective and youth development principles to work with youth in care if youth are to reap the benefits of youth development efforts.

Seventh, with the two perspectives' emphasis on strengths and assets of adolescents, youth promotion practice can expand the realm and scope of the social work with young people to the promotion of competence. As Chalmers (2000) notes, staff need to learn "how to see youth as competent and as having potential, while also emphasizing problems enough to address important issues and to keep referral sources assured that they are attending to fixing problems and issues" (p. 27). Youth are often simply not seen as having the capacity to participate in activities or events that would require appropriate public behavior and the capacity to share their knowledge. If an individual youth is viewed by social workers and/or care providers as particularly insightful, it is still uncommon to find adults actively trying to nurture those competencies in meaningful ways.

Implication for Social Work Education

As youth promotion practice is conceptualized as a convergence of a youth development and the strengths perspective, several areas of implications are drawn for social work education. Implications suggested below are based on study participants' recommendations, insight from the literature reviews and implications of the youth promotion model that is proposed in this study.

First, social work education needs to include a course or class on strengths-based youth development as the social work profession extends its service to the youth development field, as it already happening. One of the challenges that the youth development field faces is the question of who will step forth to claim this practice as their own. However, social work education does not really focus on youth development per se (Hellison, 2000, p. xii). Youth promotion practice can supplement the lack of a "home" discipline for strengths-based youth development, thus allowing social work to expand opportunities for the employment of its graduates.

Second, the study findings support this suggestion as many study participants stated that social work overlaps with a lot of aspects of youth development field. Among the youth professionals who perceived that the youth development field is a profession or needs to be a profession, nine participants believed that youth development is a part of social work profession. Eight participants suggested development of direct coursework on youth development and twelve participants emphasized the importance of training for youth professionals. The youth development field has no formal education system and no trained professionals, whereas social work has established system of providing formal education with degrees or licensure. In fact, social work's usefulness to strengths-based youth development work is also described by fourteen participants.

Third, emphasis on non-clinical practice and inclusion of more youth-serving organizations in practicum sites need to be emphasized for social work education. Eight participants stated curriculum issues including teaching more child development topics, having more strengths-based workshops, more actual talking about youth issues, and more youth development organization-based practicum. In particular, four social work participants pointed out that social work curriculum is too clinical and thus helping students to become clinicians. Also, as indicated by some participants, it is also important to pay more attention to faith-based practice or spirituality issues as it turned out to be one of strong supporting factors for the strengths-based youth development practice.

Implication for Social Policy

In order to support a strengths-based youth development or youth promotion practice, it is logical to change existing policies in the direction of incorporating the strengths perspective and youth development principles. In general, existing national and state or local laws and

regulations provide the legal basis for youth policies. This enables states or local communities to prioritize use of existing resources within legal frameworks to achieve specific objectives. However, it is recognized that it does not have a comprehensive set of youth policies and it especially lacks youth development policies, few policies have focused on strengthening young people's positive development. Little attention goes to preventing the onset of problems of young people from a strengths-based positive youth development perspective.

It should be emphasized that the improvement of the strengths-based positive development perspective is more effective and fundamental to reduce problems among youth. In order to improve current trends in youth policy, more policies need to strengthen the community programs that focus on how well young people will be prepared or how fully they will be engaged in positive activities outside of the formal education system. Thus, youth policy needs to provide youths with positive developmental opportunities and supports.

The policy and program activities need to redesign to promote the development of positive behaviors in youth and to protect against the development of any problematic issues. The strengths-based youth development policy can be implemented by employing community youth participation components in the related laws, regulations, or ordinances. The policy change into the strengths-based positive development policy is very feasible, because a strategy similar to a positive development component already exists in the current youth policies.

Although the strengths-based policy changes are important and feasible, the strengths-based approach to practice and policy may be hard to implement in the current practice and policy situation. There are also gaps between short-term outcomes and long-term policy changes. The United States still has a long way to go in its discussions of the strengths-based youth policy

on youth related issues. Establishing strengths-based youth development policies takes time, patience, and vision, and requires the involvement of a full range of actors.

However, the efforts of organizations and communities are emphasized to enable youth to move along the pathways to adulthood by supplying the supports and opportunities necessary to develop beyond simple problem prevention. In particular, the time seems opportune to reassert the social work presence and contribution in the strengths-based youth development framework for better work with young people.

Implication for Research and Future Study

Research is supportive of the strengths-based positive development programs and theoretical support exists for the benefits of positive youth development. However, as noted in the earlier chapters, there are few studies exploring the meaning of strengths-based youth development practice and few studies have been done from a social work perspective or through qualitative methodologies on the topic. In order to address this gap in neglected areas of the strengths-based youth development practices, this study proposed a conceptual model of youth promotion practice as a converging practice of youth development work and the strengths perspective.

As indicated by the study participants, further studies are needed to promote the strength-based practice for youth development professionals and social workers. Although there has been increased attention given to defining and assessing youth program quality and youth professional training, a better evaluation of youth development programs and professional practices are suggested. The field of youth development and social work need to hear more positive things about what youth are doing and what is going on in their life. One fundamental way to address

youth problem prevention is also to keep young people on a positive trajectory by engaging them in positive activities from an early age in their childhood.

As discussed, the strengths perspective and youth development approaches have commonalities and differences, and each approach has strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, by converging the two perspectives into youth promotion practice, better professional service, support, and opportunities can be provided to children and adolescents in need and all young people in the end. If promoted with acceptance and belief in the strengths and positive development, young people will produce better positive outcomes and create more confident relationships in the community. Their energy and strengths will contribute to the societal development in a more productive way.

Indeed, among the purposes of social work is the amelioration of the impact of traumatic events in the lives of people. However, the study identified that the field of social work with young people is moving beyond treatment and prevention toward youth promotion practice as a convergence of a strengths perspective and youth development. Although applying the youth promotion practice into social work can be an exciting experience, this will no doubt challenge practitioners in bringing the exact form of practice into day-to-day operation. In addition, how to address the criticism on the strengths perspective and youth development can be a challenge since the two perspectives are converged into youth promotion practice. There is a need for more research to deal with the development of principles and strategies for better youth promotion practice.

If the social work profession is to be relevant to youth promotion practice, social workers' professed interest for a strengths perspective and youth development is necessary. If social work wants to infuse a youth development principle into existing practices, they need to emphasize

"non-traditional" settings, such as schools, youth-serving organizations, and community centers. Social work education must put more stress on the strengths perspective and positive optimal development of youth with less focus on clinical aspects. As the quest for new conceptual frameworks for practice is essential for continuing innovation, more studies to conceptualize youth promotion practice are needed for better social work with children and youth.

Summary

This chapter provides a new direction of youth promotion practice for better social work with young people as a convergence of a strengths perspective and youth development principles based on the literature review and study findings. The necessity and importance of combining the strengths perspective and youth development toward youth promotion practice are addressed. As a converging practice of a strengths perspective and positive youth development, youth promotion practice is defined as "a process of enhancing youth strengths and resources to promote positive outcomes and help young people to be a productive citizen."

Insights from participants and the literature were synthesized to present a conceptualization of youth promotion and its implications for social work. Major characteristics of youth promotion practice are analyzed in contrast to the strengths perspective and youth development principles. Youth promotion can be understood as having similar but different goals, targets, assumptions, strategies, and emphasis. Youth promotion practice emphasizes three key principles or themes: strengths promotion, relationship promotion, and participation promotion.

Several advantages of youth promotion practice are discussed as its implication for better social work with children and youth. Implications for social work education are addressed as well including curriculum development on strengths-based youth development, emphasis on non-clinical practice and non-traditional settings, and inclusion of youth development

organization for practicum sites. Redesigning of the existing policy and program activities to promote the development of positive behaviors in children and youth is mentioned as an implication for social policy. Further studies on the development of principles and strategies are needed for better youth promotion practice.

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APPENDIX A: PHASES OF INQUIRY

Phases	Tasks	Period
Phase 1: Research Design Refinement	1. Refine Research Plan	March, 2007 – July, 2007
	2. Literature Review	March, 2007 – July, 2007
	3. Interview Guide & Consent Form	April, 2007
	4. Proposal Defense	May, 2007
	5. Obtain HSCL approval	May, 2007
	6. Organizing Consultant Panel	May, 2007
	7. Pilot Interview Guide	June, 2007
	8. Contact with Potential Participants	June, 2007 – July, 2007
Phase II: Data Collection	1. Refine Research Plan	July, 2007 – October, 2007
	2. Conducting Audio-taped Interviews	August, 2007 – October, 2007
	3. Conducting Follow-up Interviews	August, 2007 – October, 2007
	4. Ongoing Member Checks – Accuracy	August, 2007 – October, 2007
	5. Transcribe Audiotapes	August, 2007 – November, 2007
	6. Check Transcripts for Accuracy	August, 2007 – November, 2007
	7. Advice from Panel & Methodologist	August, 2007 – November, 2007
Phase III: Data Analysis	1. Developing and Refining Coding Guide	September, 2007 – November, 2007
	2. Coding Transcripts & Analyses	September, 2007 – December, 2007
	3. Peer Debriefing	September, 2007 – December, 2007
	4. Member Checking – Key findings	September, 2007 – December, 2007
	5. Conduct Audit with Methodologist	December, 2007
Phase IV: Completion of the Study	1. Findings Synthesized	January, 2008
	2. Writing Preliminary Report	January, 2008 – February, 2008
	3. Advice from Consultant Panel	February, 2008
	4. Audit Check with Methodologist	February, 2008
	5. Complete Final Report	March, 2008 – April, 2008
	6. Dissertation Defense	April, 2008

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction/Description of Current Job

1. Please describe your current job from your perspective.

   Probe: How would you describe your main responsibilities as youth professional?

   Probe: How long have you been working with children and youth in general?

Definitions of Strengths-Based Practice

2. What do the terms “strengths” or “strengths-based practice” mean to you and your organization/agency? Please give an example.
3. What does the term “positive youth development” mean to you and your organization/agency? Please give an example.
4. What are the commonalities between positive youth development and the strengths perspective?
5. What are the differences between positive youth development and the strengths perspective?

Roles of Youth Professionals

6. What do you expect the role of the youth professionals in the program to be?

   Probe: What are the most important characteristics of youth professionals?

Practice Principles

7. When professionals practice, they often work from a set of guiding practice principles. What are your basic guiding principles that you apply in your work with young participants?

Youth-Adult/Professional Relationship

8. What do you believe an effective youth-adult relationship should look like?

   Probe: How are you supportive of youth, their learning, and their growth in the program

   Probe: Please provide an example of that.

9. When I say “professional boundary,” what does that term mean in relation to your practice?

   Probe: What would you consider important ethical issues regarding professional boundaries to maintain with youth?

Benefits and Challenges

10. What do you think of the benefits of strengths-based practices to youth and to yourself?
11. What factors do you think support your ability to implement a strengths-based youth development work in your practice?
12. Would you describe the aspects that hinder you from implementing a strengths-based approach to practice?

    Probe: What are the biggest challenges or frustrations for you in this work?

Agency Contexts

13. What agency contexts such as agency policy and supervision, do you think support strengths-based practices?

    Probe: Please describe your agency’s support of practicing a strengths approach?
14. What agency barriers make it hard for you to practice a strengths-based youth development work?

Suggestions for Better Youth Development and Social Work Practice

15. Do you think that positive youth development work is a distinct profession? Please explain.

    Probe: In what ways? Please provide examples from your experiences.
16. Do you think that youth development professionals are different from social workers? Please explain.
17. Please make suggestions for youth development professionals (social workers and others) to promote the youth development practice.

Probe: How can youth development professionals (social workers and others) better advocate for positive youth development?

18. Please make suggestions to enhance strengths-based practice.

    Probe: How can social workers better advocate for positive youth development?

19. Please make suggestions for enhancing education for youth service professionals that would promote strengths-based positive youth development practice?

    Probe: What things can be added to social work education?

Closing Question

20. Is there anything that I missed or should ask? Please suggest.

APPENDIX C: INVITATION SCRIPT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Hi, my name is Jeong Woong Cheon from the University of Kansas in the School of Social Welfare.

The person who is working at (Name of Organization) gave me your name. He/she talked with you about possibly participating in a study about how you practiced strengths-based positive youth development work. This is what I'd like to talk with you about. Could we talk for a few minutes? If yes, the following will be presented:

I would like to invite you to be interviewed as a part of my study on how and in what ways youth professionals practice the strengths-based youth development work. Because youth development practices and the role of youth professionals are so significant in the lives of children and youth, and because few studies looked into youth professionals' experiences with youth development practices, I am very interested in your perspective. I am hoping that the information you give us can contribute to a better understanding of youth professionals' roles, contribution to positive youth development, and implementation of the successful positive youth development practices.

Your privacy is very important to me – and I want you to be honest about your experience. If you agree to be interviewed, I will make sure that this is done in private and no one will know what you say in the interview – except for the researcher actually doing the interview.

Would you be willing to be interviewed? If yes, please tell me when would be a good time to meet. If no, please explain.

APPENDIX D: SCREEING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of the organization (agency): _____
2. What is the total number of years you have been employed full-time in professional youth development work, regardless of the number of employing organizations?_____
3. How long have you been working in this organizations/agencies? _____
4. Have you ever participated in a training session on strengths-based practices? If yes, please write the date and program name of the first training session you attended. □ Yes □ No

   Year of training _____ Name of the training _____
5. Where did you obtain your information about strengths perspective or youth development?

   _____
6. With which ethnic group do you identify?

   □ Native American □ Asian or Pacific Islander

   □ African American/non-Hispanic □ White/non-Hispanic

   □ Hispanic □ Other (Please specify) _____
7. What is your gender? □ Female □ Male
8. What year were you born? _____
9. What is the highest level of education you have completed?

   □ Less than high school □ High school diploma

   □ GED □ Some college, no degree

   □ Associate degree e □ Bachelor's degree

   □ Masters degree □ Doctoral degree

   □ Other and Unknown: _____
10. What is your most recently earned degree (BSW, MSW, MA, etc.)? Please indicate the name of degree and your area of study.

    Name of degree _____ Area of study _____

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Introduction
The School of Social Welfare at the University of Kansas supports the protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study.

Volunteer Status
Your participation in this study is solicited, but is completely voluntary. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without any type of penalty.

Purpose
The purpose of the study is to explore the way that youth professionals apply strengths-based practices for the positive youth development. I would especially like to know about how and in what ways you practice the strengths-based youth development work. Through this research, I also want to find out your role in the practice, the meaning of strengths perspective and positive youth development, the nature of the relationships with young people in the work, and the benefits and challenges of your professional practices.

Procedure
By giving your written consent to participate in the study, you are consenting to (a) be interviewed with a guiding questionnaire once or twice about your experiences of strengths-based practices with children and youth, (b) provide relevant materials or document, if any, and/or (c) judge the credibility of the study's findings.

Time Commitment
The first interview will be conducted for a maximum of 90 minutes and second interview will take up to 40 minutes if necessary.

Audiotapes
With your permission I would like to tape record your interviews. Should you want the tape recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview, please do not hesitate to let me know. The tapes will be kept in a safe place in my home and destroyed after 4 years. Your interviews will be transcribed, but all identifying information will be removed from the typed copy. This will preserve your confidentiality. The results of the interviews will be analyzed qualitatively. This means that I will go over many of the main issues raised by you and others, and summarize them in a form that allows me to get insights.

Risks and Benefits
There are no known risks for you anticipated in participating in this study. Also, there is likely no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, but it will provide information to better understand strengths-based youth development practices.

Confidentiality

I will make diligent effort to preserve the anonymity of participants and agencies. Your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study. The data from this study will be coded from tapes. This data will be organized by a number assigned to you so that your identity will be available only to the researcher and will remain completely confidential..

For Further Information
If you have concerns about the study or your participation in it, please don't hesitate to ask questions. If you would like additional information concerning this study before or after it is complete, please feel free to contact me by phone (785-830-9154) or email (jwcheon@ku.edu). Should you wish to speak about this project to someone else, you may contact my dissertation chair at 785-864-8939. If you have any additional questions about your rights as a research participant, you may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email dhann@ku.edu or mdenning@ku.edu

Are there any costs involved with the study?
There is no cost to you to participate in the interview and you will not be paid for participating in this study

Before You Sign This Document
By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in a research study. Be sure that any questions have been answered to your satisfaction and that you have a thorough understanding of the study. If you agree to participate in this study, a copy of this consent statement will be given to you.

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature, I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age and that I have received a copy of the consent form.

Print name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Audiotape Release Form

I give consent to be audio taped during this study:
Please initial: _____Yes _____No

Researcher Contact Information

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APPENDIX F: SCODING SCHEME

1. Characteristics of the Participants

I. Encounter and Familiarity with the Strengths-based Practice
- A. On-job/ at working organization or agency
- B. at training
- C. at school/formal education
- D. Others/through career

2. Understanding the Strengths-Based Practice (Research Q # 1)

II. Defining the Strengths-based Youth Development Practice
- A. Youth development
  1. Developmental process of growth
  2. Positive perspectives with emphasis on strengths and assets
  3. Programmatic framework of giving opportunity and chance to develop skills.
  4. Providing resources and building relationship
- B. Strengths perspective
  1. Emphasis on strengths and asset
  2. Client-driven
  3. Relationship building and connectedness

III. Similarities and Differences of the Youth Development and the Strengths Perspective
- A. Application of the two approaches
- B. Similarities
  1. Looking for strengths
  2. Positive traits
  3. They are the experts
  4. Resources and community
- C. Differences

IV. Guiding Practice Principles
- A. Strengths and resources
  1. Belief in youth and youth work
  2. Strengths and skill development
  3. Importance of family
- B. Working relationships
  1. Love, respect, and trust
  2. Active listening and mutual learning
  3. Self-awareness
  4. Professional boundaries
- C. Safety, engagement, and empowerment
  1. Safety
  2. Engagement
  3. Empowerment
- D. Mission, faith, and social justice

1. Mission and faith
2. Social justice
3. Non judgmental and having fun

3. Understanding the Youth/Adult Relationship (Research Q # 2)

V. Understanding the Roles and Characteristics of Professionals
A. Roles of youth professionals
1. Giving opportunity of decision making
2. Active listener
3. Developer – Filling their lives with relationship, faith, and skills
4. Being a friend-like mentor
5. Being a role model
6. Being a resource
B. Characteristics of youth professionals
1. Knowledge
2. Skills
3. Attitude

VI. Youth-Adult Relationships
A Honesty, mutual respect and trust
B. Shared relationship
C. Active listening and learning
D. Being supportive
E. Professional boundaries
F. Providing a good role model
G. Genuineness
H. Others

VII. Professional Boundaries
A. Importance of professional boundaries
B. Meaning of professional boundaries
C. Types of professional boundaries
D. Ethical Issues
1. Confidentiality
2. Family relationship
3. Self-revelation
4. Reporting
5. Religious work
6. Electronic contacts
7. Personal gains
8. Intimate relation
9, Touching
10. Double roles
11. Others

4. Benefits and Challenges of the Strengths-based Practice **(**Research Q # 3)

VIII. Loving Aspects and Frustration
- A. Loving Aspects
  1. The people that they are working with
  2. Valued their job as a positive impact
  3. Identification with the organization/agency
  4. Personal passion and faith
- B. Frustration
  1. Systems and agency
  2. Funding
  3. Social perceptions
  4. No magic answer and high expectation
  5. Others

IX. Benefits of Strengths-based Practice
- A. Benefits to youth
  1. Empowerment
  2. Self-determination
  3. Being a positive contributor
  4. More success/better outcomes/moving forward
  5. Relationship facilitation
- B. Benefits to professionals
  1. Learning
  2. Providing better environment
  3. Giving program direction

X. Challenges and Hindrance
- A. General Hindrance
  1. Resources
  2. Characteristics of programs and environment
  3. Getting people/general perceptions
  4. Client factors
  5. Attitude of youth workers
  6. Not a profession
  7. Criticism on the strengths perspective
- B. Agency contexts
  1. Mission/philosophy/policy
  2. Boss/board of directors
  3. Staff/department-sharing philosophy
  4. Size/rules/need time
  5. Funding
  6. Training/knowledge/education
  7. Agency politics/cooperation

XI. Supporting Factors

A. General supporting factors
    1. Youth-centered and strengths mindset
    2. Characteristics of programs
    3. Youth participation
    4. Others
B. Agency Contexts
    1. Mission/philosophy/policy
    2. Boss/board of directors
    3. Staff/department-sharing philosophy
    4. Size/rules/need time
    5. Funding
    6. Training/knowledge
    7. Meeting time

5. Suggestions for better Strengths-based Practice (Research Question # 4)

XII. Understanding Strengths-based Youth Development Field
A. Professionalization of youth development field
    1. Profession
    2. Non-profession
    3. Part of social work
B. Social workers vs. youth workers
    1. Similarities
    2, Differences

XIII. Suggestions for better Strengths-based Practice
A. Research and evaluation
B. Training
C. Supportive contexts
D. formal education
E. Recognizing the field and professionalization
F. Having attitude toward strengths-based practice

XIV. Suggestions for Social Work Education
A. Developing classes
B. Curriculum
C. Non-clinical focus
D. Practicum
E. Creating friendly context
F. Others

APPENDIX G: PRELIMINARY REPORT FOR FINAL MEMBER CHECKING

1. Descriptions of the Definitions and Guiding Principles of Strengths-based Youth Development Practices

I. Defining the Strengths-based Youth Development Practice

Study participants were asked to explain their understanding of the definition of the youth development and the strengths perspective as well as the meaning of the strengths-based practice. Youth development was described as developmental growth process, a positive perspective with emphasis on strengths and assets, programmatic framework of giving opportunity and chance to develop skills, and building relationships and providing resources for children and youth. The study participants also identified the strengths perspective as strengths-focused, client-driven, relationship building and connectedness-centered, and solution-focused.

II. Similarities and Differences of the Youth Development and the Strengths Perspective

Many study participants explained the application of the youth development principles and the strengths perspective in the related fields. For instance, one participant said "the strengths perspective is used in positive youth development by taking it as a starting place where young people begin in their development." Many participants identified similarities between youth development practice and the strengths perspective. Six respondents pointed out that both practices are looking for strengths that clients already have. Four mentioned that both practices are building upon the positive traits of the clients and move forward from it. Two used the phrase, "they are the expert," which means the decision-making is handed to consumers in both strengths-based practices. Nine participants also described the differences between the strengths perspective and youth development work. Youth development practice is related to youth specific population, environmental contexts, building skills and assets, and the community development and resiliency factors, whereas the strengths perspective becomes specific when using assessment tool and applied to broader population.

III. Guiding Practice Principles

The analysis revealed that the practice principles were organized around five primary principles. 1) Many participants stressed several terms related to strengths and resources with regard to their guiding practice principles. 2) The working relationship between young people and professionals was an essential component of the working process, and it was characterized by love, respect, and trust, active listening and learning, self-awareness, and professional boundaries. 3) The key feature of self awareness is central to youth professional's effectiveness in discerning the nature of equality, enhancing relationships, and to employing best practices in their interactions with youth. 4) Five youth professionals described youth participation including engagement and empowerment as a guiding principle. 5) Four participants described safety principle that anyne who works with youth needs to apply to their work. For one participant, it is safety of the youth, safety of the family, and safety of the person working with the youth. 6) Among other principles, faith or spiritual belief, mission of the organization, and being non judgmental need to be mentioned.

1) Do you agree with the summary? (Please check or circle) Agree Disagree

2) Please explain your response.

3) Would you suggest any changes or additions to this part of summary?

2. Understandings of Youth-Adult Relationship

I. Understanding the Roles of Professionals
As study participants outlined, their perceived roles and duties ranged from such specific knowledge of social situations of youth and importance of adultism to more abstract roles and attitudes such as giving youth the opportunity of decision making; filling their lives with relationships, faith, and skills; being passionate and sincere; and providing positive-focused and non-clinical practice. All participants stated several roles of youth professionals in youth development practice. This includes opportunity giver, active listener, relationship and skill developer, friend-like mentor, a role model, and being a resource person for the youth.

II. Youth-Adult Relationships
Study participants were asked to identify what they believe an effective youth-adult relationship should look like. Many study participants acknowledged the importance of healthy relationships between themselves and the youth they serve in the programs. Through data analysis, several themes of honesty, mutual respect, trust, active listening, being supportive, good role model, being genuine, and having a shared relationship emerged as being attributes of an effective youth-adult relationship. For example, one of the key among these relationships was the expression “it’s a win-win situation” for the youth and the adults where both parties value and respect the other person’s opinions, beliefs, and ideas. The importance of keeping professional boundaries for an effective relationship was also stated by some participants.

III. Professional Boundaries
Study participants were asked to answer the meaning of the term, professional boundaries to their practices. 1) Ten participants mentioned the importance of professional boundaries in their statements. 2) Professional boundaries were defined as societal boundaries that “have to do with how close we can be with a young person” and “not taking advantage of the situation that you’re in.” 3) Methods for appropriate ethical behaviors and proper professional boundaries have been variously developed in order to ensure the protection of the youth-adult professional relationship. Touching issues, safety, confidentiality, self-revelation, reporting, religious work, electronic contacts, personal gains, double role issues between youth and adult worker were mentioned as examples of ethical issues to maintain good boundaries.

1) Do you agree with the summary? (Please check or circle) Agree Disagree

2) Please explain your response.

3) Would you suggest any changes or additions to this part of summary?

3. Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of the Youth Development Practices

I. Benefits of Strengths-based Youth Development Practice
The participants were asked to name the benefits of strengths-based youth development practice to adult professionals and young people. The majority of respondents indicated that youth professionals experienced benefits of learning, providing better environment and getting program direction in their practice. Study participants also pointed out the benefits they see young people gaining from engaging in strengths-based youth development. This includes empowering, being a positive contributor, having more successes and moving forward, increasing self-determination, and relationship facilitation.

II. Supportive Factors and Challenges of the Strengths-based Practice
1) Study participants were asked to describe factors supporting their ability to implement a strengths-based approach. Many participants identified youth-centered mindset, characteristics of programs, having a supportive mentor, youth participation, faith and spiritual belief as significant supporting factors. 2) On the contrary, limited resources, youth program characteristics that are whimsical in nature, getting people to buy into youth development philosophy, multiplicity of client factors were described as challenging factors. Adultism, youth worker's attitude and general criticism on the strength perspective were pointed out as well in relation to barriers or hindrance of the strengths-based practice. 3) Study participants were also asked to describe supportive agency contexts and barriers to practice positive youth development. Eight themes were emerged from the participants' responses including agency mission, boss, staff, size, funding, training, meeting time, and cooperation among agencies.

Important Agency Contexts

	Supportive or Challenging Agency Contexts
Mission & Philosophy	Having the same philosophy of agency. Having a culture and policy for strengths-based practice. Open to new ideas, Believe in the mission.
Boss or Board of directors	Different vision between agency/boss and staff. Dedicated board of directors. Flexible supervisors who understand different styles of work.
Staff, Department	Having staff sharing the same philosophy. Sharing the same philosophy from all levels of management and department. Not having youth or colleagues that used to other models. staff turnover.
Training & Education	Continuing training for workers, Lacking system of promotion, Having regular staff meetings
Size, Rules, Procedures	Small groups and one-on-one attention, Smaller agency with less bureaucracy, Having less rules and regulations, Incentives to youth
Funding	Inconsistent and sustained funding, More facilities and staff Having no governmental money
Cooperation	Agency politics and cooperation

1) Do you agree with the summary? (Please check or circle) Agree Disagree

2) Please explain your response.

3) Would you suggest any changes or additions to this part of summary?

4. Suggestions for Better Strengths-based Youth Development Practices

I. Understanding Strengths-based Youth Development Field
1) Many participants stated that youth development work is a distinct profession or can be a profession, whereas some participants understood that the field is not seen as a valid profession. Among them, nine participants said that social work overlaps with a lot of things with youth work field. 2) Many participants understood similarities between social work and youth development work in terms of both are human services and helping job, same roles of professionals with similar skills, and having the same level of empathy and compassion for humans. 3) However, differences between social work and youth development field are also identified: involvement in families vs. dealing with everything; license required vs. not required; social work degree vs. combined majors; involvement after problems vs. before problems; youth specific field vs. people including children and youth in general; and educational philosophy vs. service oriented.

II. Suggestions for Better Strengths-based Practice
All participants were asked to make suggestions for better strengths-based youth development work Twelve participants stated training, seven mentioned recognizing the youth development field, six emphasized having attitude toward strengths-based practices. Five participants also stressed enhancing formal education, four participants suggested supportive contexts and more research and evaluation of the programs for better strengths-based youth development work.

III. Suggestions for Social Work Education
For social work education, many participants addressed class development, curriculum, practicum, friendly context, emphasis on non-clinical practice, and training. In particular, eight participants stated that direct education in coursework on youth development practice is necessary to enhance education for youth development professionals. Better understandings of what youth are going through today and how to teach youth social skills are also suggested. Two social worker participants specifically pointed out that social work curriculum is too clinical and thus social workers have a tendency of labeling clients.

1) Do you agree with the summary? (Please check or circle) Agree Disagree

2) Please explain your response.

3) Would you suggest any changes or additions to this part of summary?

Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX H: AUDIT TRAIL CONTENTS

Classification	File Types	Evidence
Instrument Development	Interview guide	Successive drafts and feedback from the chair and methodologist
	Questionnaire	Screening questionnaire and feedback from the chair/methodologist
	Invitation Scripts	Invitation scripts for research participants
Raw data	Sampling process/Referrals	List of potential participants (referred from two training agencies) with basic demographic characteristics and contact information
	Correspondence with two agencies	Email correspondence with two organizations for participant referrals
	Consent form	Signed consent forms by all study participants
	Questionnaire	Used questionnaires for characteristics of all study participants
	Audio tapes	Audio tapes that recorded interviews and panel meetings
	Interview transcripts	Original transcripts
	Interview guide	Used interview guide for each interview
	Field notes	Description of phenomena, feeling, impression, and notes on interviews of respondents and inquirer
	Correspondence with participants	Email or phone correspondence with all study participants to make interview schedule and other arrangements
	Correspondence with committee members	Email or phone correspondence with dissertation committee members
	Correspondence with consultation panel members	Email correspondence with two consultation panel members to make meeting arrangements

Data Reduction And Analysis	Coding categories	Successive drafts of coding scheme Final coding guide (Jan 23 version)
	Coded data by cases Coded data by categories	Quotations filed according to cases Quotations filed according to categories
	Reflexive journal	Reflections written in journal
	Field notes	Description of phenomena, feeling, and notes on interviews of respondents and inquirer
	Member checks	Member check notes (Reviewer's comments) used for all study participants after the interview to check accuracy of transcriptions
Data reconstruction and synthesis	Case summaries	Summary of the information of each case
	Coding summaries	Summary of the information of each coding categories
	Outlines of patterns	Arrangement of concepts and categories (Tables)
	Findings and conclusion	Drafts of reports
	Member checks	Written feedback (comments) from participants about the case summary
	Final member check	Summary of findings, feedback from a methodologist about the summary Written feedback from participants about the summary of findings
Process Notes	Methodological log	Protocol for decisions and procedures
	Reflective journal	Reflections written in journal
	Peer debriefing notes	Notes from meeting with committee members and consultant panels
	Schedule for a dissertation	Schedule with tasks and dates
Intention and Disposition	Research proposal	Successive drafts and feedback from a chair and a methodologist
	Dissertation proposal	Dissertation proposal and PowerPoint presentation for the oral exam (defense)

		Feedback from dissertation committee of a plan for a revision
	HSC-L approval	HSC-L application, feedback from a dissertation chair and methodologist. A letter of HSC-L approval (including Informed consent form)
	Correspondence to communicate with HSC-L personnel	E-mail correspondence
	Handouts in agency meetings for recruitment of study participants	Study description, questionnaire for demographic characteristics
Finding /conclusion	Total data set	Final written documents
Appendix	Electronic files & Documents that are not included in the audit trail	Types of electronic files that are not part of the audit trail.
	Participants' confidential information	Participants addresses and phone numbers
	Audit trail	January version February 08 version

* Hand written notes at interviews.